

Phoenix: Play and Critical Essay

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Abstract

Phoenix is a tragicomic play that tracks the descent of four boozed up Brits abroad on a fateful stag do to Warsaw, Poland. Dave and Haz grew up together as best friends, but whilst Haz was on duty in Afghanistan, Dave fell in love with, and proposed to Ella – an engagement which has since ruptured Haz and Dave’s previously juvenile activities and, subsequently, their friendship. Now it is Dave’s stag do, and Haz, along with the help of loveable idiot Bear, has one last chance to spend some ‘quality’ time with his best friend and perhaps corrupt him a little on the way. However, these attempts are scarpered by Dave’s love for Ella and the presence of Ella’s younger brother, James, an odd young man with a fascination with war poetry and modern history. James is a symbol of Dave’s future and Haz’s demise, and soon becomes a vulnerable and pivotal person who Dave tries to protect and who Haz seeks to destroy. As the rain soaked holiday veers from debauched expectations, the stags clash antlers, and the ghosts of the past clash with the fear of the future, where warfare, machismo and violence are irrevocably taught, learned and lived.

Contents

Part 1

Thesis Play:

<i>Phoenix</i>	2
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Part 2

Critical Analysis:

<i>Introduction</i>	i
<i>Emulating Edmond: Early Ideas and First Draft</i>	ii
<i>Jakob: Ghetto Research and Giving Up The Gun</i>	v
<i>Battling With Blanka and Writing The Boy</i>	ix
<i>The Scene Six scenario: Edward Bond's 'Saved' and How to Write a Murder</i>	xiii
<i>'All it is is problem-solving': Phoenix's present and future</i>	xvii

Bibliography	xx
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Phoenix

by Joe White

SETTING:

Warsaw - March 2011.

CHARACTERS:

DAVE, twenty-eight

HAZ, twenty-eight

BEAR, twenty-seven

JAMES, twenty-two

JOHN, fifty-five

JENNY, forty-five

JOANNA, sixteen

BARMAID, twenty-two

BLANKA, thirty-six

YURI, forty

STAR, fifteen

BOY, seven

The following characters can be played by the same actor:

JOHN/YURI can be played by one middle-aged man

JOANNA/BARMAID/STAR can be played by one young woman

A ‘/’ in the text indicates overlapping dialogue.

Prologue

In the darkness we hear heavy breathing and running feet, sinking into sand. Bullets ripple past. Motors churn. Then we hear the whimper of a young BOY, up close as if right next to us. He is whispering in Pashto, and he is calling for his father.

Easyjet flight from Birmingham to Warsaw. 11:40 am.

Suddenly, and deafeningly loud, we hear 'Chelsea Dagger' by The Fratellis. The lights snap to reveal a busy bile-orange Easyjet airplane, smoothly cruising at thirty-three thousand feet above the shining sea. Everything onboard is in silent slow-motion. HAZ, a good-looking athletic young man dressed in trousers and a white t-shirt which reads 'HAZ' is sat in the aisle seat. He is using his mobile phone to take a picture of a young girl, JOANNA, who is perhaps fifteen or sixteen and who has fallen asleep across the aisle from him. She is sat next to her two elderly parents JOHN and JENNY. Next to HAZ sits BEAR, a large man who is the exact shape of a wheelie-bin. BEAR has been asleep since the beginning of the flight, and is dribbling down a white t-shirt which reads 'THE BEAR', and which is far, far too small for him. DAVE is sat by the window. He is dressed in a pink fairy outfit with a sash that reads 'DAVE'S HEN NIGHT'. He is bound by matching pink fluffy handcuffs, blinded by a pink fluffy blindfold and deafened by a pair of huge black headphones. He sits very still.

HAZ puts his phone away, reaches over BEAR's protruding stomach and grabs DAVE's headphones. As they come off his head, the music snaps off and is replaced by the noise of the engines churning, metal rattling, holiday makers murmuring and a distant baby's cry. The scene suddenly becomes normal pace. HAZ grabs his phone, clicks a button and then quickly pulls DAVE's blindfold off. DAVE checks his surroundings.

HAZ: *(To phone)* Recording. Dave wakes.

DAVE: JESUS CHRIST. *(Beat)* My eyelids are...

HAZ: *(Pointing phone towards DAVE)* How are you feeling, Davey?

DAVE: Do my handcuffs. *(Beat)* HAZ.

HAZ: Alright.

HAZ leans over BEAR.

DAVE: Prick.

HAZ: Stop flirting.

HAZ purses his lips and presses a catch on the handcuffs, releasing DAVE. Beat.

DAVE: Where are we flying? What are you doing?

HAZ: It's a surprise.

DAVE: Surprise? Can you... Is it hot?

HAZ: (*Big smile*) I'm not allowed to say, mate. Sorry-

DAVE: Ibiza?

HAZ: Sorry. It's a surpri-

DAVE: 'It's a surprise'. Is it? I'll tell you what a surprise is, Haz. What a surprise is, is being kidnapped after work for – And what's the point this? With the blindfold?

HAZ: Looks professional-

DAVE: Well, now I feel motion sick. So-

HAZ: Bless.

DAVE: What's that?

HAZ: Interview.

DAVE: Fuck off with that, Paxman-

HAZ: Any last words?

DAVE: What? No. Fuck off with that.

HAZ: (*Into phone*) That was Dave. Thank you, Dave.

HAZ clicks his phone off and puts it in his pocket as DAVE gathers himself and picks his eyelids off his eyes. After a few heavy breaths, he notices BEAR.

DAVE: Look at this.

HAZ: He was asleep before we took off.

DAVE: Is he comatose? Bear. BEAR.

BEAR doesn't respond.

DAVE: What did he drink?

HAZ: Alcohol.

DAVE: How / much?

HAZ: / A paddling pool.

DAVE: BEAR. Wake up!

DAVE flicks BEAR's nose who, still asleep, re-adjusts himself in the seat, moving so that his large, pale torso spills over onto HAZ's arm, crushing it.

HAZ: BEAR!

He pushes BEAR, to no avail.

HAZ: BEAR! Oh fuck! Now. Look. Dave. Fucking lard everywhere! It's like a beanbag fucking porridge belly. Get off!

DAVE laughs as HAZ pushes again.

HAZ: Look at this love handle here? *(Beat)* It's like a Christmas Ham. *(Taking a huge breath and trying the love handle again)* HEEEEAVE.

It doesn't budge. People around start to stir and watch.

HAZ: And now he's DRIBBLING!

DAVE: OK, keep / it down a bit, Haz.

JOHN: *(Quietly to JENNY)* / It was only a matter of time before those imbeciles piped up.

JENNY: *(To JOHN)* Shh!

HAZ: BEAR!

DAVE: Haz, shut up.

JOHN: Dressed up like that. We should have gone business cla-

JENNY: / Shh!

HAZ: / (*Whispering angrily to BEAR*) You've invaded me, Bear. And your spit stinks! Get off!

DAVE: Keep your voice down.

HAZ: BEAR!

JOHN: Shhh!

JENNY: John, I'm nervous as it is. Stop it.

HAZ suddenly lashes out and, with flying, gathering hands, manages to scoop up all of BEAR's excess lard and places it back on the BEAR's side of the arm-rest. He rubs his arm, exhausted.

HAZ: Bloody woolly mammoth.

DAVE shakes his head and looks around nervously.

HAZ: What's wrong with you?

DAVE: You. Shouting your mouth off.

HAZ: I couldn't feel my arm, Dave. I was losing circulation. (*Beat*) Oh.

DAVE: What?

HAZ: Your flying thing.

DAVE: What?

HAZ: Your flying thing. Your fear of flying.

DAVE: I'm not scared of flying.

HAZ: Yes you are.

DAVE: No. *(Beat)* Not as much. Sometimes. I'm alright. And I'm not scared of flying. I'm scared of crashing and dying.

HAZ: Oh, come on Dave. Crashing? You know there's more chance of –

DAVE: I know, more chance of dying in a car crash-

HAZ: *(Grabbing a love handle)* No, there's more chance you'd suffocate under this fat prick.

DAVE: Yeah.

(Pause)

DAVE: Have I got a bag?

HAZ: I packed your essentials. Clothes. Tampons.

DAVE: Where's my phone?

HAZ: Banned.

DAVE: What?

HAZ: Your phone is banned for the weekend, deaf-aid.

DAVE: You've got yours.

HAZ: Who am I gonna text, Dave? The only people I know are on this plane.

DAVE: What about Ella?

HAZ: She's not here.

DAVE: No. What about phoning Ella?

HAZ rolls his eyes. Small pause.

HAZ: *(Looking at BEAR)* You seen his t-shirt? *(Beat)* Coming up like a crop-top. He looks like a fat, hairy spice girl.

DAVE: I thought it looked tight.

HAZ: *(Smiling)* I ordered it three sizes too small.

DAVE laughs.

HAZ: And Goblin unpacked most of his other clothes.

(Beat)

HAZ: We threw out his pants. He doesn't know yet.

DAVE: He has more than one pair of pants?

HAZ: He could have borrowed Nicky's.

They both laugh loud. John tuts.

DAVE: So, James is here? Good. *(Looking around)* That's good. And you packed together? That's good. Where's he sat?

HAZ: At the back somewhere. And it's not James, it's Goblin. And it's not good, it's compulsory.

DAVE: I'm not calling him that.

HAZ: But he's got a green dick like a Goblin.

DAVE: No, he doesn't. *(Beat)* Haz, you know... He doesn't know when you're joking sometimes. You know that.

HAZ: If he has to be here, then he will have to deal with being called Goblin. Christ. Just because Ella wanted her spastic little brother to-

DAVE: Don't say that-

HAZ: What?

DAVE: Spastic.

HAZ: What? Why?

DAVE: Just don't call him that.

HAZ: Alright, retard then. Can we agree on retard?

DAVE: He's... just funny is all. He's not My Left Foot.

HAZ: Dave, the first time I met him he tried to hold my hand.

DAVE: He was joking. He does that sometimes. Look just be nice. There's no point in him being here if you're gonna take the piss the whole time. OK?

(Beat)

DAVE: OK?

HAZ: If he starts with that army shit again-

DAVE: He won't.

HAZ: Because I don't need that-

DAVE: He won't. OK?

HAZ: OK.

DAVE: *(Looking back)* I hope he's alright on his own.

HAZ: *(Looking back, barely listening to DAVE)* Yeah, he's probably wanking some bloke off right now.

JOHN tuts loudly.

DAVE: I doubt that.

HAZ: Maybe they're just kissing then.

DAVE: Right.

HAZ: He's definitely holding the air steward's hand.

DAVE: OK.

HAZ: Or willy.

JOHN: *(Aside)* Bloody. Chavs.

DAVE can't help but laugh a little. HAZ stares at JOHN and JOANNA. JOHN begins to read a paper. Small pause.

DAVE: Did Ella know you were doing all this?

HAZ: (*Whispering*) You seen her?

DAVE: Haz, did Ella know that you were kidnapping me?

HAZ: Kidnapping?

DAVE: Practically.

HAZ: (*Quietly*) You seen her? The girl sat with that old- (*Quietly wolf-whistling and winking at the Heavens*) Nice job, God! What a slut-

DAVE: (*Whispering*) Her parents are right there.

HAZ: (*A bit quieter*) We should congratulate them-

DAVE: What about Ella?

HAZ: Yeah, yeah, Ella's lovely too, but she's a scorcher.

DAVE: No, does Ella know?

HAZ: Yeah, yeah, 'course. (*Nodding and winking at the leg*) Look at that bacon.

JENNY: Did he just wink at me?

JOHN: (*Reading*) I very much doubt it.

HAZ: (*Moving so DAVE can get a better view*) Can you see her properly?

DAVE: (*Whispering*) I can see the toddler.

HAZ: Her?

DAVE: She's fifteen or something.

HAZ: No way Marvin Gaye. Eighteen at least. (*Beat*) I bet she's as wet as October -

DAVE: What are you going to do - make a move on a fifteen year old girl, who's asleep next to her elderly parents on a plane?

HAZ: Yeah 'cos I'm a Massive Lad.

DAVE: You're a paedo.

HAZ considers this.

HAZ: Perhaps.

DAVE: Perhaps?

HAZ: Perhaps we all are. Me *and* you. All of us. Paedophiles. *(Pause)* Have you ever thought, Dave, that we could all be paedophiles - it's just that we haven't met the right baby yet?

DAVE smiles and shakes his head, shushing HAZ.

DAVE: So Ella's fine with all this?

HAZ just about nods, still looking at JOANNA.

HAZ: No, she is definitely legal. *(Pause)* She is a righty tighty. *(Whispering to BEAR)* What's that Bear? You want to double-team her in the toilets? I doubt you'd fit in the cubicle, you fat ape.

DAVE: *(Quietly, getting pulled into the joke)* Don't you have to pay for that now?

HAZ: What? Sex? He does.

DAVE: No, the toilet. On an Easyjet plane. Or is it Ryanair?

HAZ: What are you on about?

DAVE: Paying for the toilet.

HAZ: You don't.

DAVE: I think so.

HAZ: No way.

DAVE: Do you have 50p?

HAZ: No.

DAVE: Well then, no mile-high club with the cabbage patch kid. And stop staring. Her parents will see you.

HAZ: *(Quietly)* They love it! *(Beat)* Dave, you don't buy a sports car to hide it in a garage.

DAVE: What does that even mean?

Slight turbulence begins.

DAVE: *(Quietly)* Bloody hell.

DAVE stares out of the window in panic. HAZ watches him for a moment and smiles.

HAZ: You know it's fair enough that you're scared of flying, Dave.

DAVE: I'm not scared of flyin-

HAZ: Well, you know sometimes, maybe, it's just because you don't know all the facts. The only fear you have is fear itself.

DAVE: No, Haz, the only fear I have is of dying in a sodding plane crash -

HAZ: You know when... and my Corporal told me this because he was a pilot, so it's true... you know when a plane starts to crash, you're told to go into the brace position? Well, what a lot of people don't know is that the brace position was actually made to break your neck on impact. It's true. So you die instantly and you / don't have to sit there.

DAVE: / Now's not the time.

JENNY: *(To JOHN, upset)* What's he saying?

HAZ: You don't sit there and burn alive or drown or freeze / or whatever.

DAVE: / This is...

HAZ: So you bend your neck over like this. And when the plane smashes into the ground, your neck snaps on the chair in front. Crack! / Your neck just snaps like a Twiglet.

JOHN: / *(Putting the paper down)* OK, dear, don't worry. / Just concentrate on the wing. See how smooth the clouds are?

DAVE: / Alright.

More turbulence.

HAZ: So families don't have to sit and watch each other burn to death-

JENNY: / What?

DAVE: / Haz.

HAZ: So that a little kiddie / can be put out of its misery and not know anything about it.

DAVE: / I know what you're doing, / this isn't helping me. Don't make me-

JOHN: / (*To JENNY*) OK dear. Just concentrate / on the clouds. See how smooth they are?

HAZ: / Also, you don't see anything then, do you? You're not watching other people's faces in panic or people having heart-attacks or vomiting or -

DAVE: (*Noticing JENNY's panic*) Alright. It's a very good point. Now, please keep your FUCKING voice down -

HAZ: It's because it's just you there. Just you, facing the little fold-down table that will eventually be the end of you... Because, you can't seriously think that pushing your head up against a little chair like this is actually going to save your life -

JENNY: (*Really panicking*) What did he say? The brace position does what?

JOHN: The clouds! (*Pressing his button*) I'm going to report this Neanderthal –

JENNY: Don't go anywhere.

DAVE: Haz, I'm going to move, I'm going -

HAZ: Bear wouldn't be able to bend over that huge gut of his, so he's fucked if we crash. Burned alive. It would take him ages to melt.

The plane rattles. A baby cries.

JOHN: This... imbecile... Where's the / airhostess? (*To HAZ*) Shut up! (*To JENNY*) Just remember the clouds, dear.

HAZ: / What else is there?

DAVE: It's past a joke now. Shut up. That bloke -

HAZ: Birdstrike.

DAVE: Haz.

JENNY: Bird what?

JOHN: *(To HAZ)* Shut up!

DAVE: Haz. Nineteen-

HAZ: That's when the plane hits a bird or a flock of birds / and they take out the engines.

That's what happened with the plane that landed in the Hudson in New York. Geese.

Canadian geese too, so all the yanks on board were doubly pissed off.

DAVE: / *(To JOHN and JENNY)* I'm so sorry about him. *(To HAZ)* They're calling the air hostess, Haz. Nineteen ninety-

There plane hits an air pocket. There is a crack noise.

DAVE: Jesus.

HAZ: Oh shit. Was that a goose?

DAVE: No!

JENNY: A goose?! BIRDSTRIKE!

JOHN: Shut up!

HAZ: I think we're going to die.

DAVE and JOHN: Shut up!

HAZ: If that was a Canadian goose then we're fucked.

JENNY: I'm not doing the brace position! No! No! Even if that was a Canadian Goose.

JOHN: JENNY, JUST LOOK AT THE FUCKING CLOUDS!

HAZ: Dave. If this is the end, know that I've always loved you.

Heavy rattling. The 'seatbelt' sign lights and the accompanying 'bing-bong' noise bing bongs. JOANNA, the sleeping girl wakes.

JOANNA: Mum? What-

HAZ: Oh, hang about.

DAVE: Please Haz.

JOANNA: What's that?

VOICE OF FLIGHT ATTENDANT: *(Quietly overlapping the following dialogue)* Ladies and gentlemen... we are currently experiencing some mild turbulence. The captain has asked for you to stay seated and that your seatbelts remain on for the next few minutes. Thank you.

HAZ: Dave, check whether the engine's on fire?

JENNY: The engine's on fire?!

JOANNA: The engine's on what?!

JENNY goes into the brace position, then remembers not to and sits upright.

JOHN: *(To JENNY and JOANNA)* Nothing! *(To HAZ)* Will you shut up? You have no respect! *(Begins to undo his belt)* I'm gonna have you thrown off!

JENNY: / DON'T UNDO YOUR BELT!

DAVE: / Haz, shut up! Nineteen ninety-

HAZ: *(Calming DAVE)* All I need to know is whether it was a Canadian goose that hit us or not. You can tell by the way it says 'about', like 'aboot', with an 'oo' -

DAVE: NO. They're going to throw us off-

HAZ: HOW? How Dave? They're not going to throw a hero off a plane at 33, 000 feet, are they? I was in the fucking newspapers mate. I'm a national treasure.

JOHN: *(To HAZ)* National treasure? You're a pest!

HAZ: What?

JOHN: You're an ASBO, boy! You looter!

HAZ: (*Aggressive*) What?

DAVE: Haz.

JENNY: John!

JOANNA: Dad!

HAZ: (*To JOHN*) What did you say?

JOHN: You're not a national treasure. You're a disease. / All of you. A god-damned pandemic.

JENNY: / (*To JOHN*) Stop it.

HAZ: I fought for you, mate-

JOHN: Not for me, you didn't. Not in a fake war.

HAZ: Fake?

DAVE: 1992.

HAZ looks at DAVE. The turbulence subsides.

HAZ: (*To DAVE*) What?

JOANNA: (*To JOHN*) Dad. Stop it.

A BOY shouts somewhere on the plane. It is faint, but the word 'flar' can be made out ('father' in Pashto). HAZ hears it instantly. The others don't at all.

JOHN: Bloody. Common. (*Quietly*) Scum.

DAVE: Alright?

BOY: (*Offstage*) Flar! Flar!

DAVE: 1992.

HAZ: (*Slightly distracted by the BOY's cry*) What?

DAVE: 1992.

JOHN: (*Quietly*) Looting. Rioting. Scum.

DAVE: (*To HAZ*) Did you hear me?

HAZ stares down the plane. Beat.

HAZ: (*Looking back*) Hear?

DAVE: Did you hear me?

HAZ: The...

DAVE: 1992, I said.

HAZ looks at DAVE, nods, and looks for the BOY again. Though, now, the cries have subsided.

DAVE: (*To JENNY*) I'm sorry for him. He's not... right... (*Beat*) And don't worry about flying. I used to be the same. But the statistics are right; it really is one of the safest forms of transport.

(*Beat*)

JENNY: Sorry for him too.

DAVE: Oh, / no problem.

JOHN: / WHAT?

JENNY: (*To JOHN*) Enough now.

HAZ stops trying to listen for the BOY's cry. Small pause.

HAZ: OK.

DAVE: (*Quietly to HAZ*) Congratulations, Haz. No, really well done. One of your finest, that. You fucking prick. Only a 1992 would stop you. The first 1992 in three years. On my stag do.

DAVE looks out of the window and blows his cheeks. Small pause.

HAZ: (*Staring at DAVE*) Oh Christ. This is it, isn't it?

DAVE: What?

HAZ: This is married Dave isn't it?

DAVE: No.

HAZ: You look old.

DAVE: I just don't want us to get kicked off, Haz.

HAZ: Have you got Alzheimer's? Take your pills old man. Fucking. Wrinkly - I tell you what, five years ago it would have been me having to shut you up. A year ago, you would have already fucked that bird –

DAVE: I've never cheated on Ella-

HAZ: Bullshit.

DAVE: And she's too young-

HAZ: You've seen off younger-

DAVE: I JUST want to have a stag-do without any-

HAZ: And what a stag-do! Let's whisper on the plane and talk politics and read our books and be in bed by eight. You used to be such a fucking lad.

DAVE: No -

HAZ: You used to be THE lad. Our gang. And may I remind you that this is supposed to be a holiday for me and you to celebrate the last three days of your single life-

DAVE: I'm not single-

HAZ: It is our chance to be lads again. Kids. Just boozed up kids. Running about. With girls.
/ Before you turn into *that* old git over there.

DAVE: / I don't want to go with any girls.

HAZ: Before you move off to the country and have kids and never see me again -

DAVE: Now, don't be ridiculous Haz-

HAZ: It's not ridiculous, Dave, not ridiculous. *(Beat)* Come on. We both know you won't see me. Not with Ella. Not like this anyway. It will always be with her. And your kids. And I'm no good with families-

DAVE: Who said anything about kids?

HAZ: You'll have kids-

DAVE: Who said?

HAZ: No one-

DAVE: Right. So, what's this about?

(Beat)

HAZ: It's nothing. *(Pause)* It's nothing, mate.

An awkward moment.

HAZ: Right, I need a shit. *(He starts to undo his seatbelt)*

(Beat)

DAVE: Do you have a pound?

HAZ: What?

DAVE: For the loo.

HAZ: I watched a bloke go earlier and he didn't have any money.

DAVE: Ahhh, yeah, he probably paid before.

HAZ: What?

DAVE: Yeah, you can pay for the toilet on card before the flight now. When you're ordering your meal.

HAZ: What?

DAVE: Yeah, everything's pre-paid. Though you need to know how many pisses and poos you're going to have beforehand.

HAZ: Don't be-

DAVE: So, have you got a pound?

HAZ: I thought it was 50p.

DAVE: 50p for a wee. Pound for a poo.

HAZ: Fuck off.

As HAZ removes his seatbelt and begins to get up, he sees a small, skinny man, JAMES starting to move down the aisle towards them. JAMES is Ella's little brother and looks even younger than he is. He is a little tipsy, and takes his time to get to them. He wears a pair of shorts, a white t-shirt that reads 'THE GOBLIN', and a jumper which hides it.

HAZ: Oh, Christ, look at the state of this.

DAVE: How much has he drunk?

HAZ: Why should I know? He's your best mate-

DAVE: He's not-

JAMES: Ah David! Glad to have you with us. Welcome to Hell.

DAVE: *(Shaking his hand)* Alright, James.

JAMES: You know where we're going yet?

HAZ: It's a surprise.

JAMES: He'll guess.

HAZ: No-

JAMES: *(Noticing BEAR)* No wonder the blob's passed out with the amount he drank in the airport.

HAZ: He's alright.

JAMES: Has he thrown up yet?

HAZ: He can handle it.

JAMES: Soon / I bet.

DAVE: / You alright back there?

JAMES: Yeah, I'm fine. There are some... (*Leans in*) Well, I was a bit concerned when this brown man sat right next to me. Unfortunately, he's quite obviously a Muslim-

DAVE: James.

HAZ: Keep your voice down, Goblin.

JAMES: I told you, / it's James.

DAVE: / It's James.

JAMES: I'm not being racist. / I'm just ... He has two phones. Which aren't supposed to be on, as everyone knows. And he keeps looking between them and then checking his iPod. And you're not supposed to have your phone on-

HAZ: / No, you are.

DAVE: I wouldn't worry about him, James. The loo's down there on the left, mate.

JAMES: (*To DAVE*) In a minute. (*To HAZ*) Haz, you know what they look like.

DAVE: James mate, I think you should go to the loo.

JAMES: No, David, it's good to have someone who's been trained at this sort of thing.

HAZ: Dave, sort him out-

DAVE: / James-

JAMES: / I thought you'd want to have a look, Haz. You'd want to protect us all.

DAVE: Please go back to your seat, or go to the loo.

JAMES: (*Trying to joke*) You know what they say, bad things come in small Pakis.

DAVE: JAMES!

JOHN: Shh!

HAZ: *(To JAMES)* What the fuck are you-

JAMES: *(To HAZ, joking)* For all we know, he might be the one who did your leg in.

HAZ is so angry and taken aback that he almost laughs.

HAZ: Wha-

DAVE: James. Go and sit down. Now.

JAMES: I'm – I want Haz to check. And then he can sit back down. I just don't want to get blown up.

DAVE: James!

HAZ stares away. JAMES stares at him, confused. He wants to touch him. Beat.

JAMES: Sorry, I didn't mean anything by it. I just- I was joking. Just- OK. *(Beat)* I'm going to the toilet.

DAVE: Alright James.

JAMES: *(To HAZ)* And. Haz. Don't call me Goblin again.

JAMES moves off. HAZ studies the fold-down table in front of him, his jaw clenched, his teeth beginning to tighten, his veins angrily pumping blood around his neck and head.

(Pause)

DAVE: You alright?

HAZ: Yes.

(Small pause)

HAZ: Yeah.

HAZ takes a deep breath in and out. He looks at his leg for a moment. DAVE watches him. Pause.

HAZ: You told him about the leg?

(Beat)

DAVE: He's very inquisitive -

HAZ: Does he know how it happened?

(Beat)

DAVE: Not really.

(Small pause)

HAZ: What about the boy?

DAVE: About...?

HAZ: The boy.

(Beat)

DAVE: What boy?

With a sudden jolt, BEAR wakes up. His large, heavy eyelids open and he gazes around the plane, barely focusing. DAVE welcomes the break in tension.

DAVE: Well look at this! It's the dawn of man.

BEAR looks at him and smiles.

DAVE: Welcome to the World, Bear... Bear, where are we flying to, mate?

HAZ: It's a surprise, Bear.

BEAR smiles and splutters.

DAVE: Where are we flying?

HAZ: Bear –

Suddenly, and violently, BEAR vomits. There isn't much, but what there is not only covers himself, but also HAZ and DAVE who wince intensely. BEAR gathers himself and looks at DAVE with a drunken smile.

BEAR: War-saw.

(Beat)

HAZ: Surprise.

The lights smash to black. During the scene change, we hear heavy breathing and feet running on sand. There is something metal clinking and motors churning somewhere. Then, suddenly, there is the sound of a bullet tearing through the air.

Act One

Scene One.

Bar Bambino. 1:55 pm

The sound of a thunder clap and very heavy rain. Bar Bambino is cheap, plastic, nasty and quiet. The men change into shirts and t-shirts. For the first time, we see how severe HAZ's limp is - he should use a cane, but doesn't. BEAR has no change of shirt and has to make do with his sick-stained one. Before the scene starts, the guys get drenched with water.

DAVE: Jesus.

BEAR: Didn't need a shower before, did we?

JAMES: You shower?

DAVE smiles.

HAZ: The weather's supposed to get better by 3.

JAMES: I hope so. Or we'll need to build an arc.

DAVE smiles again.

HAZ: Well. We'll see won't we?

(Beat)

BEAR: This is a dump, ennit?

HAZ: It's just a pit stop.

JAMES: Actually Haz, it's just the pits.

BEAR chuckles.

DAVE: Well.

HAZ: Well, better in here than out there, in that, you twats.

A BARMAID enters.

HAZ: Now. Right. Look. Boys. Here's what we're here for! Not the decor! This! Remember?
(*Introducing the BARMAID*) Gentlemen – Warsaw. Warsaw – Gentlemen.

BARMAID: What?

HAZ: Nothing, love. Four beers.

DAVE: I'll have a coffee to start with.

HAZ: No you won't Dave.

BARMAID: Beers?

DAVE: I'm knackered.

JAMES: / (*To the BARMAID*) Yes please. Four beers.

BEAR: / (*To DAVE*) You probably should have had a kip on the plane.

HAZ: Dave, it's your stag do. Now stop being a doe and act like a fucking STAG.

DAVE: I couldn't sleep on the plane, Bear. Not like you.

BEAR: Yeah, but I had the weirdest fucking dream. About these fucking exploding geese.

HAZ: Dave. Beer.

BEAR: Are there any cocktails?

JAMES: You drink cocktails?

BEAR: When I'm abroad.

DAVE: What?

BEAR: I like the lifestyle abroad.

DAVE: In Warsaw?

BARMAID: What?

HAZ: (*To BEAR*) No, enough of that. (*To the BARMAID*) Four beers. (*To the group*) Let's have ourselves a skull full.

BARMAID: OK.

The BARMAID begins to pour the beers.

BEAR: She looks a bit like Nicky, don't she?

JAMES: Who?

DAVE: Bear's ex-girlfriend. He broke up with her because she had these really thick, matted pubes. He said that it was like a hairy pair of pants –

BEAR: Most the time, I had to do her up the bum because otherwise it was like sticking Velcro to my gooch.

JAMES: That's grotesque.

A plane flies overhead. It is loud.

JAMES: JESUS.

BEAR: Loud, ennit?

DAVE: It is loud, yeah.

JAMES: Maybe we should just get a cab to the hotel and settle in?

HAZ: We've got to wait for Blanka.

DAVE: What?

HAZ: Blanka. Our guide.

JAMES: Guide?

BEAR: Blanka?

HAZ: Yeah. *(To JAMES)* And what do you mean settle in?

BEAR: Blanka? Like wan-

DAVE: Yeah, Bear.

HAZ: We won't be settling in Goblin. We're gonna drink this city dry.

Another plane flies overhead. Even louder.

BEAR: (*Shouting*) This is so fucking grim!

DAVE: Where's this Blanka bloke then?

JAMES: (*Looking out*) It's James.

HAZ: What?

JAMES: I told you. Call me James. (*Starting to wander*) Look at these walls. Cracking like... It's like the end of the world in here.

BEAR: What?

JAMES: It looks war torn.

HAZ: (*To DAVE*) What's he-

DAVE: Nothing.

JAMES: And with all those planes.

HAZ: It's cheap.

JAMES: Well yes. That's what matters I suppose.

HAZ: Yes. It does. To us. To me and Dave.

DAVE: Well-

HAZ: When we were eighteen, we camped the whole south of England for two weeks on fifty quid. Remember?

DAVE: Uh. Yeah.

JAMES: (*Distant*) Well. There you go. But look at the walls. The cracks.

As the BARMAID finishes pouring the beers, JAMES inspects the walls and ceiling.

JAMES: (*Quietly*) A shillin' a day.

Another plane flies loudly overhead.

BEAR: (*Shouting*) Fucking hell!

DAVE: Let's just drink these beers. Shall we? Drink the beers?

HAZ: Your new best mate's trying to embarrass me, Dave.

DAVE: He's not my new best mate.

HAZ: Look at him.

JAMES: (*Looking around the room, talking to himself*) 'I'm old and I'm nervis,
I'm cast from the Service,
And all I deserve is a shillin' a day.'

HAZ: What's he going on about? Oi!

DAVE: Haz. He's... you know... He just quotes things sometimes. Repeats. Nothing bad...
Just. Poetry.

HAZ: Quote what?

DAVE: He likes war poetry.

HAZ: What?

DAVE: From school. University.

BEAR: He's a fucking spastic, en he?

DAVE: Bear-

HAZ: What did I say about this war stuff, Dave?

BEAR: Is he, like, a freak / genius or summin'?

DAVE: / He doesn't mean anything-

HAZ: I don't want that fucking war stuff again.

DAVE: OK. Alright. He won't start. He's harmless. Just quoting. Just repeating things. Let's
drink these beers, shall we?

BEAR: And then out of this grim loud shit hole.

HAZ: Alright-

DAVE: James. Beer mate?

JAMES: Yes please. (*He moves over*) Shall I say a few words?

BEAR: What?

JAMES: Well, David *is* my brother-in-law-

HAZ: Not yet.

DAVE: If you'd like to, James.

JAMES: (*Holding his beer*) To David.

BEAR and DAVE raise their glasses. HAZ sips his.

JAMES: 'Quaintest thoughts, queerest fancies
Come to / life and fade away.'

BEAR: / What?

JAMES: 'What care I how time advances;
(*Proudly*) I am drinking ale today!' (*Beat*) To David. The best brother-in-law you could wish for.

HAZ scoffs quietly.

DAVE: (*Smiling*) Thank you, James.

BEAR: Queerest fancies?

Laughing, JAMES puts his arm around DAVE, who leans into him a little nervously. HAZ watches.

DAVE: Who was that? The quote?

JAMES: (*Very happy*) That was- That was- That was Edgar Allan Poe. I remembered it on the plane.

BEAR: *(To JAMES)* What did you mean queer fancies? Are you queer? *(To HAZ)* Is he queer?

JAMES: No. No. Not at all. *(Sipping his beer)* Cheers David.

HAZ: It's lager.

JAMES: Sorry?

HAZ: It's lager. Not ale. So well done, but you're wrong. You little green-dick cum farter -

DAVE: *(Stern)* 1992, Haz. 100%. 1992.

BEAR: What?

HAZ looks away.

BARMAID: Eight euro twenty.

DAVE: Stop it.

JAMES: What's 1992, David?

HAZ: Stop calling him David.

JAMES: Stop calling me Goblin.

DAVE: I quite like it actually.

HAZ: What?

BEAR: Goblin?

BARMAID: Eight euro twenty.

DAVE: No. David.

HAZ: You always hated that.

BARMAID: *(Loud)* Please. Eight euro twenty.

DAVE: Oh. OK.

DAVE begins to rustle in his pocket.

BEAR: No, Dave. Stop that. Haz, tell him.

HAZ: No, you're not buying anything today, mate. *(Beat)* This one's on Goblin.

JAMES looks at HAZ, who nods and smiles.

DAVE: I can get this one.

JAMES: *(Still holding HAZ's gaze)* No, David. I have some money. *(He turns to the bar)* A shillin' a day.

HAZ stares at the back of JAMES's head, who goes to the BARMAID and takes out his wallet.

JAMES: *(Over his shoulder)* Anything for my new brother-in-law. *(To the BARMAID)* How much, beautiful?

HAZ: *(Quietly)* Beautiful?

DAVE: *(Quietly, to HAZ)* Nineteen / ninety two.

BARMAID: / Eight euro twenty.

JAMES: Sure thing. *(Beat)* Sure...

JAMES places the money in the BARMAID's hand and stares at her for a little bit too long. She smiles broadly at him, and, as he notices his hand, he makes an awkward part-cough-part-laugh-part-snort noise.

BARMAID: Thanks. Beautiful.

JAMES: Well...

She giggles, winks at him and moves off to sort the money.

BARMAID: *(Giggling and shaking her head)* Beautiful.

Staring, flabbergasted, JAMES moves away, hunched over and slightly ducking.

DAVE: You alright, James?

JAMES: Yes, I'm fine, thank you David. Can we please sit down somewhere please?

HAZ: What?

BEAR: What are you doing?

JAMES: I just need to put my beer down for a...

HAZ: Goblin...

JAMES: It's James-

HAZ: Is that?

JAMES: Please can we-

HAZ moves over, lifts JAMES's arm and stares at his crotch. JAMES's beer spills a little.

HAZ: *(Laughing)* Fucking hell! He's got a boner!

BEAR: / Has he?

JAMES: / No! No I haven't!

HAZ: He's come in his fucking pants.

BARMAID: What?

JAMES: No, I haven't. David, I don't.

DAVE: Boys! / Leave him!

HAZ: / You fucking pervert, Goblin! You got a boner handing money over!

BARMAID: What?

JAMES: No, I'm fine.

HAZ: She's not a whore, Goblin. She's a barmaid.

BARMAID: He is...?

JAMES awkwardly stands straight, pulling his hips back so that his bum sticks out. BEAR laughs hysterically.

HAZ: *(To the BARMAID)* He's... *(Acting an erection)*. Erection!

The BARMAID giggles nervously.

JAMES: Please.

BEAR: Look at that ovary baster!

DAVE: Boys!

JAMES: David.

HAZ acts a massive erection with his arm. The BARMAID laughs loudly and rubs her hand on her apron. HAZ pretends to masturbate his arm.

JAMES: *(To the BARMAID)* Now, stop it! You stop laughing! *(Screaming)* DON'T YOU DARE LAUGH AT ME!

The BARMAID moves back in shock. HAZ and BEAR try to stifle their giggles. JAMES sucks in a big gulp of air and hands DAVE his beer. He holds back tears.

JAMES: I'm sorry, David. *(Beat)* Tell me when the taxi's here. *(Beat)* I'll be outside.

He stares at HAZ as he leaves. The BARMAID exits, embarrassed and a little frightened. Small pause.

HAZ: Right then. The plan of action.

DAVE: What the fuck are you trying to do?

HAZ: What?

DAVE: With James.

BEAR: He had a boner, Dave. That's hilarious.

DAVE: No, Bear-

HAZ: Oh fuck the fuck off, Dave. That *was* hilarious. He touched her hand and he spurted baby gravy all over his pants. Jesus. How is that not funny?

(Small pause)

BEAR: *(Knowingly, to HAZ)* Married Dave.

DAVE: No.

HAZ: Dave. James just came for eight euros. That's the cheapest prostitute in the world.

DAVE looks at them for a second. A small smile cracks on his face.

HAZ: Imagine if he'd given her a tenner.

BEAR and HAZ laugh.

BEAR: I'm just glad to know that he's not a queer. With all that queer poem stuff. *(Beat)* I'm surprised he even works down there.

BEAR looks over at HAZ for approval, but HAZ looks at his watch.

BEAR: Didn't think he would.

HAZ: Right, Bear. So, the plan: After here, Blanka will take us to the hotel. Then he's taking us somewhere to eat. *(Beat)* Then off for some activities. Then out toni-

DAVE: What activities?

HAZ: We have an appointment at four.

DAVE: Where?

HAZ: It's a surprise.

DAVE: Not a strip club.

HAZ: You'll have to wait and see.

DAVE: Haz, man, I promised Ella tha-

HAZ: Shut up Dave. Right Bear. A toast! *(He clears his throat)* None of this poem shit. A proper one. A bit of practice for next week. So... *(He steadies himself and raises his glass)* ... This beer, here, is for Dave. My best mate. And it's for Bear, for being here.

BEAR: And you, for coming home.

DAVE: Here here.

HAZ: And Warsaw, this great old city for having us. It's for all the gallons of booze that we'll drink and vomit back out again on to these old streets. And to these old streets that will hurt us so much when we fall over. This stag do is going to end all stag dos. People will talk about this for years to come. They'll build statues of us. One for every corner of the city. And young men from all over Europe will gather and pray to them. Worship the statues of sex Gods. We are warriors. Imperialists. Invaders. Conquistadores. Let's claim this city! Let's conquer it and DEFEAT all of its lovely, bubbly, big-titted, soaking-wet, horny-as-hell, dick-sucking, ball-licking, cum-guzzling blonde and brunette Polack sluts! May you sit, squat, squeeze, squeal and squirt in celebration of us! May you bow to us doggy-style! This beer, gentlemen, is to men and manhood! *(He takes another swig)* And to Dave... and all of the women that he's going to miss tonight. Cheers!

BEAR: / Cheers!

DAVE: / Yeah, cheers.

As HAZ was toasting, BLANKA, an attractive woman in her late thirties, enters and watches from the bar. She wears a black dress, has a deep streak of blue through her hair, and has tattoos up her arms and on her chest.

BLANKA: You are stag-do from England?

They stop drinking and turn around to her. She smiles and moves to the middle of them.

BLANKA: I am Blanka. Your guide.

HAZ: What?

BLANKA: *(To HAZ)* I heard your toast. *(Taking out a tissue)* You are best man?

(Beat)

HAZ: You're Blanka?

BEAR: *(To HAZ)* A woma-

BLANKA: I'm your guide. Here. *(She hands the tissue to HAZ and smiles)* Wipe your mouth. You talk shit.

The men are stunned. As the lights brighten and the set changes around the men and BLANKA, there is a horrific crash, like a plane ploughing through a building. But no-one hears it.

Scene Two

Bench outside Hotel Phoenix. 3:20pm.

It is very cold, grey and still lightly raining. DAVE and JAMES huddle close, listening to BLANKA. HAZ stands aloof.

JAMES: It's cold.

HAZ: *(To BLANKA)* We thought you were a bloke.

BLANKA: No.

HAZ: Well, we wanted a bloke.

BLANKA: *(Laughing)* You think I'm pussy just because I have one? You want best tour guide in Warsaw. Then I'm your man. I guide you through hell.

HAZ: I asked for a -

BLANKA: So. From here, you have a beautiful view of Vistula.

DAVE: Vistula?

BLANKA: Vistula is the river. Very beautiful.

HAZ: *(To DAVE)* Fucking women.

JAMES: This area is very dirty, isn't it? Grey and dirty.

DAVE: Don't / worry-

HAZ: / Not that playground. Yellow.

JAMES: Grey sky. Grey clouds.

BLANKA: It is typical for March.

DAVE: It looks like England.

JAMES: (*Quietly underneath*) 'We only know war lasts, rain soaks, and clouds sag stormy. Dawn massing / in the east her melancholy army...'

HAZ: / For fuck's sake. Shut up-

DAVE: Haz.

JAMES: 'Attacks once more in ranks on shivering ranks of grey.'

DAVE: So. Blanka The hotel.

BLANKA: (*To the hotel behind them*) You are fourth floor. OK rooms.

HAZ: Look's good.

JAMES: Does it?

BLANKA: You get what you pay for.

JAMES: Yeah. A shillin' / a day.

BLANKA: / But you have good view of Praga Park to left.

HAZ: Where?

BLANKA: Down to the... left, see? Praga Park.

JAMES: The bit of grass next to the derelict factory?

BLANKA: Ah, the factory is not shut. There is lots of smoke.

JAMES: Oh, for Christ's sake.

DAVE: We're only here to sleep, James.

BLANKA: But Praga Park is beautiful in summer. This park is soldiers park for Polish first army.

JAMES: Is that why you chose the hotel, Haz? Because of the soldiers park?

HAZ: Of course it fucking wasn't.

BLANKA: What?

DAVE: (*To BLANKA*) Haz was a hero. He fought.

HAZ: No I wasn't, Dave.

JAMES: What are you talking about? Yes, you were.

DAVE: Is Bear alright checking us in?

HAZ: He's fine-

JAMES: Look at that playground, David. The children look like rats-

HAZ: It's / Dave.

DAVE: / I know, James-

JAMES: It's so jagged. All that bile yellow.

DAVE: Yeah-

JAMES: They're starving. Thin, grey rats. Jesus. It looks like it's the ghetto or something.

DAVE: James-

BLANKA: That's because it is.

JAMES: What?

DAVE: What?

BLANKA: This was the ghetto.

HAZ: Was what?

JAMES: What?

BLANKA: This area was Warsaw ghetto.

DAVE: This area was?

BLANKA: Yes. (*Beat*) Where you stand. We passed the last remaining wall of the ghetto three streets ago. There was a plaque.

They pause for a second.

DAVE: Right.

JAMES: I don't like that.

DAVE: James.

JAMES: This is the ghetto?

BLANKA: Was.

DAVE: We're only here to sleep.

JAMES: *(To DAVE)* I won't sleep knowing... *(To HAZ)* Why didn't you mention that we were staying in the ghetto?

HAZ: What does it matter?

JAMES: *(Angry)* We're sleeping IN THE GHETTO!

HAZ: *(Ridiculous Elvis impression)* We're IN THE GHET-HOOO!

JAMES: Do you know what happened here?

HAZ: Obviously.

JAMES: Thousands of people died. So many children. Like those down there-

HAZ: What is this? It's not my fault the hotel stands where the fucking ghetto *was* seventy fucking years ago-

JAMES: Think of what happened on these streets, Haz. These are the same cobbles / that blood-

HAZ: / FUCK OFF, same cobbles! What are you on about?

BLANKA: What?

JAMES: I'm telling you-

HAZ: This is a stag-do, not a fucking history lesson.

JAMES: I won't sleep.

HAZ: You will with enough vodka. Look. It was shit. Once. Ages ago. But NOW it's cheap and we're here for one night. And one night only. You know? I don't feel guilty. *(To DAVE)* Do you?

DAVE: Uhm.

BLANKA: What?

BEAR can be heard offstage, swearing to himself.

HAZ: I just want to get pissed. That's all.

BEAR: *(Entering)* Jesus. Fucking Polacks... Fucking idiots! Hasn't anyone ever taught them English? For Christ's sa-

BLANKA: It's taught. Taught them. Has anyone ever taught *you* English?

DAVE and JAMES smile. JAMES moves to BLANKA, wanting to touch her or put his arm around her, but doesn't.

BEAR: They couldn't understand me.

DAVE: We barely understand you, mate.

JAMES: Don't worry about what Bear says, Blanka.

BLANKA: What?

BEAR: Can someone come talk to these fucking people?

DAVE: Shut up, Bear.

JAMES: *(To BLANKA)* You're OK, yeah?

BLANKA: Yes.

JAMES: You look upset.

BLANKA: Of course I'm not upset. I'm used to this. *(To DAVE)* You don't need to tell him to shut up. I see you every week.

HAZ: What?

BLANKA: Let's go and talk.

HAZ: See what?

BLANKA smiles at HAZ.

BLANKA: Your imperial hangover.

HAZ: What hangover?

BEAR: I'm not hungover.

JAMES: Don't upset her.

BLANKA: He's not. *(To HAZ)* It's just funny. You still think you rule the world.

HAZ: Well, we do.

BLANKA laughs.

HAZ: With America. More than fucking Poland.

BLANKA: *(Laughing)* Yes.

HAZ: The point is, Blanka, is that we don't have to learn other languages to talk to foreigners. / I don't have to learn Polish to talk to Poles. We talk to you every day in coffee shops and fucking strip clubs.

DAVE: / Well...

BLANKA: Here, you're the foreigner. And here, we learn English because we need to take money from you. Because we are smart. And because you are rich and lazy.

HAZ: And you need us.

BLANKA: Britain is very funny. Europe's stupid little brother. Rich. Spoilt. And with a serious case of short man syndrome.

HAZ: And you're getting your period over the English language?

BLANKA: No.

HAZ: Stop fucking bleeding about it.

BLANKA: I don't bleed. I'm have implant. In my arm.

HAZ stares at her. Beat.

BLANKA: So I can have sex. *(Beat)* Don't get angry. It is funny.

HAZ: Tell you what, Blanka, I'll learn some Polish especially for you.

BLANKA: What?

HAZ: I'll learn some. You teach me.

BLANKA: *(Smiles)* OK.

HAZ: OK? How do you say 'fuck you'?

BLANKA: *(Smiling still)* Spierdalaj.

HAZ: Well, spierdalaj, darling. Bridges mended? Best friends?

BLANKA: It sounds nicer than 'fuck you'.

HAZ: OK then. Spierdalaj. Spierdalaj all day long.

BLANKA laughs.

BLANKA: *(In Polish)* You are a cunt son of a bitch. Spierdalaj.

BLANKA's laugh disarms HAZ. JAMES reaches for her hand, but BLANKA shrugs his arm off and nods to HAZ.

BEAR: Uhm...

BLANKA: Oh. *(In Polish)* You fucking fat cunt. *(Exiting)* I'll talk to them for you. *(To HAZ)* Keep practising.

BLANKA exits, pursued by BEAR. Beat. HAZ looks down and rubs the floor. He holds his fingers to DAVE's face.

HAZ: See that? She's dripping for me, mate.

JAMES: Don't talk about her like that.

HAZ: Why? She's got a wide-on for me.

JAMES: Shut up!

HAZ: Did you come in your pants again?

DAVE: Haz. A word.

DAVE moves forward, HAZ gloomily follows. JAMES stands awkwardly at the back, before staring off to the playground.

DAVE: (*Quiet*) Listen, I know James isn't your cup of tea. Yes, he's a little odd. But he's young. And he's harmless. And he's family soon.

HAZ scoffs.

DAVE: I need you to get on. Alright? So try. And if you're trying already, then try harder. Because he's important to me. OK? Right. Good talk. Get-

HAZ: What do you want me to do?

DAVE: Just relax. Relax. That's all. And apologise for the bar earlier.

HAZ: Christ-

DAVE: For me. Mate.

HAZ rolls his eyes.

HAZ: When?

DAVE: No time like the present. (*To JAMES*) James, I'm going in. Keep Haz company whilst he has a fag.

JAMES: Uhm. OK, David.

DAVE: OK. (*To HAZ*) For me.

DAVE exits. HAZ takes out his cigarettes.

HAZ: Fuck me-

JAMES: Can I have a cigarette, too?

HAZ looks at JAMES.

JAMES: Please? I smoke. Sometimes. When I'm stressed. Or upset. I could use one. Being here...

HAZ sits on the bench and, with a heavy sigh, hands JAMES a cigarette.

JAMES: Thanks. Man.

JAMES sits a little too close then shuffles away.

JAMES: Could you light me up?

HAZ hands his Zippo lighter over to JAMES. JAMES holds it up, but can't quite get it to light properly. He giggles nervously. HAZ shakes his head and begrudgingly grabs the lighter and lights JAMES's cigarette for him. As he does so, JAMES watches his face and lips.

JAMES: Thanks.

JAMES quickly sucks the cigarette and blows out without inhaling.

HAZ: *(Quietly)* For fuck's sake.

JAMES does it again.

HAZ: Let it rest in your mouth and then breathe it in.

JAMES: Oh. Oh. OK.

JAMES tries and splutters on the smoke.

HAZ: Let it rest-

JAMES splutters again.

HAZ: For fuck's-

To calm himself, HAZ inhales deeply on the cigarette. JAMES watches him. Then, from somewhere in the distance, we hear a BOY screaming 'flar'. After a few cries, HAZ, bolts upright and stares out.

JAMES: Are you OK?

HAZ shushes JAMES. Pause.

JAMES: What?

HAZ: Shut up.

JAMES: OK.

JAMES listens.

JAMES: I just hear the River. And the playground.

HAZ: Shut up.

JAMES: What?

The cries get louder.

JAMES: What?

HAZ becomes overwhelmed by the cries. He stands and looks.

HAZ: I...

JAMES: What?

HAZ: I...

JAMES: Shall I get David?

HAZ exits. JAMES watches him go in to the hotel. He stares at the hotel and then the playground. We hear children shouting and running though we cannot hear the BOY's cries anymore. JAMES takes a large drag, holds it in his mouth, and breathes it easily. Another blinding light. A long burst of gun shots - fast and deafeningly loud.

Scene Three

Firing Range. 4.45 pm.

Target signs appear. The firing stops for a moment as a large buzzer sounds. DAVE and JAMES stand wearing matching blue headphones and yellow goggles. They hold hand-guns.

JAMES: Are you out?

DAVE: I think so.

JAMES: Is it three or four buzzers?

DAVE: Four.

(Beat)

JAMES: Powerful things, aren't they? Jolt your arm right back.

DAVE: Yeah, completely.

(Pause)

JAMES: Bloody powerful.

DAVE: So. What did you and Haz chat about?

Gunfire starts in the background.

JAMES: *(Shouting)* I wonder how they're doing?!

DAVE: What?!

JAMES: I wonder how they're doing next door?! Haz and Bear!

DAVE: Oh. Right! Yeah, probably well!

JAMES holds his gun up to the targets at the back of the stage. He gets the target in his sights.

JAMES: Well, Haz is an expert, right?

DAVE: Yes. I'd say so.

JAMES: This is probably child's play to him.

DAVE: What?

JAMES: This. Child's play.

DAVE: Oh, yeah. Yeah, probably.

JAMES: Yeah. Child's play. *(Beat)* You know, he didn't want to do this.

DAVE: No?

JAMES: *(Shouting)* I booked it. I don't know – MAYBE IT *(The gunfire next door stops)*
REMINDS HIM OF WARFARE-

DAVE: SHUSH JAMES! *(Quietly)* What are you talking about?

A buzzer sounds.

JAMES: It's just hearing gunfire and the feel of the gun in his hand-

DAVE: You know we don't like talking about it.

JAMES: I know. I know that.

An excited BEAR enters, followed by HAZ. They wear the same headphones and goggles as DAVE and JAMES. They also hold hand-guns.

BEAR: YEEEE HAW!!!

A piercing buzzer sounds as YURI, a grotesque man with a small hunch-back and limp, appears very far upstage by the targets. He grabs the targets and hobbles downstage towards the men.

YURI: You are like four Tom Cruises! *Top Gun*, yes? Bang Bang! You punks!

DAVE: This guy again.

JAMES: Crazy.

BEAR: He's a laugh.

YURI: You know *Dirty Harry*?

DAVE: Not personally.

YURI: (*Shouting, pointing his finger like a gun*) 'Go ahead, it's making my day!'

BEAR: Seen my head shot?

YURI: You are a good shooter. Good eyes. 'Yippee-cay-ee you motherfuckers!' You know these films? 'YIPPEE-CAY-EE MOTHERFUCKER!' You know this?

HAZ: Is it from *Mary Poppins*?

YURI: *Die Hard* 1, 2, 3 -

JAMES: Let me see my target -

YURI: And 4.

JAMES: Target please.

YURI passes it to him.

JAMES: Seen that, David? Heart shot! Blew him to smithereens!

DAVE: Nice one, James.

YURI passes the targets to DAVE and HAZ.

DAVE: Of course, you were spot on, Hazza.

JAMES: Yeah, Natural Born Killer.

DAVE and HAZ look at him.

YURI: You have shot before?

(Beat)

BEAR: Haz was in Afghanistan for four years.

YURI: Oh man! Afghanistan! 'I love smelling Napalm on mornings!' Ha ha! (*He bends over slightly and raises his arms as if on a crucifix*) 'Noooooooooooooooo!' ... (*Small pause*) From *Platoon*?

DAVE: (*Quietly to HAZ*) You fought in Nam, right?

HAZ *smiles and rolls his eyes.*

BEAR: Can we keep our targets?

YURI: We can frame them, or laminate. For money.

BEAR: Laminate?

YURI: The Laminator! 'I'll be back'. Yes? (*Pause*) It is not actually *The Laminator*; this is *The Terminator* with Arnold Swarzegger, yes? I just change the words.

DAVE: We should get them laminated, ey boys?

BEAR: I'm getting mine done. I could be in the army with shots like this, ey Haz?

HAZ *smiles and nods.*

YURI: (*To DAVE*) Blanka tells me you are to be married?

JAMES: Did Blanka mention me?

YURI: No.

DAVE: I'm getting married next week.

YURI: Oh. (*Holding his finger as a gun again and imagining shooting DAVE in the head*) 'Consider that a divorce'. (*Beat*) Arnold Swarzegger. *Total Recall*. (*Pause*) Because he shoots his wife in the head, yes?

JAMES: It's Swarzenegger-

YURI: Sharon Stone. She has a sexy beaver. *Basic Instinct*. Nice blonde vagina.

BEAR: (*Laughing*) He's right! She has!

JAMES: That's grotesque.

DAVE: Come on, boys, let's get these laminated then.

YURI: Yes! The Laminator! 'I'll be back!' Ha ha! (*Beat*) That line is not actually *The Laminator*; it is *The Terminator* with Arnold Swarze-

JAMES: OK, thank you.

YURI: You want one, soldier?

HAZ: Yeah.

DAVE: OK-

YURI: *(To HAZ)* OK. So, you shoot many people in war?

JAMES: What?

BEAR: I'm not sure if-

YURI: What's it like to shoot someone?

HAZ: What?

YURI: Because I always think as I shoot the paper: 'That doesn't sound right.' You know? /
'That should sound... heavier. Swallowed.' It is not real. Yes?

DAVE: / Excuse me.

BEAR: Shall we move on?

JAMES: Bear.

YURI: What is like to send bullet into flesh? You shoot someone in head?

DAVE: Listen mate –

YURI: There is lots of blood, yes?

BEAR: Stop -

JAMES: You shouldn't-

YURI: You have shot human head?

DAVE: Right-

HAZ: What do you want to know?

DAVE and BEAR stand silently.

HAZ: *(To YURI)* What?

YURI: I want to know what it's like to shoot a man?

JAMES: *(To YURI)* Leave this alone. He got shot in the leg.

HAZ: *(Snapping at JAMES)* What?

YURI: Well, I cannot shoot men, / so I ask you-

JAMES: / You don't want to talk about it because of the leg, right?

DAVE: James.

HAZ: *(To JAMES)* OK.

JAMES: What? I don't -

HAZ: You want to know what it's like to shoot someone?

JAMES: What?

YURI: I do.

DAVE: OK, / Haz mate.

HAZ: / You want to know? Well, I'll tell you-

DAVE: *(To JAMES)* Move back.

JAMES: I don't know what-

HAZ: I'll tell you.

DAVE: Haz-

HAZ: No, if Goblin wants to know-

JAMES: I don't-

DAVE: He doesn't.

HAZ: *(Looking deep into JAMES)* No. He does. He does want to know. He does. Don't you?

HAZ nods and quickly raises his gun to JAMES's chest. Everyone moves back and shouts. JAMES winces.

DAVE: / Fuck! Haz!

YURI: / Wo wo wo!

BEAR: / What the fuck?! Oh fuck!

JAMES: / Oh, oh!

DAVE: Haz mate, put the fucking gun down!

YURI: / Oh my God.

BEAR: / FUCK!

DAVE: HAZ!

JAMES: *(In a desperate whimper)* Please!

HAZ holds the gun for a second, studying JAMES's face. Breathing steadily. He is blank. He turns the gun into his own stomach, takes a deep breath and pulls the trigger. Suddenly, and, to everyone's relief a loud 'CLICK' sounds out. He gives it a moment to settle.

HAZ: It feels like that.

Almost smiling, HAZ drops the gun to his side. Everyone lets out a huge breath.

HAZ: Nothing.

The scene instantly smashes to black. In the darkness, we hear heavy breathing and feet running on sand. There is something metal clinking and motors churning somewhere. Bullets fly overhead. And, from somewhere distant, voices can be heard shouting. They are foreign, but not Polish. In the darkness, we see the red glow of a burning cigarette.

Scene Four

Bench outside Hotel Phoenix. 5.45pm

The lights snap up, deep-orange of sunset. We can hear the Vistula River, distant traffic, some acoustic guitar somewhere, and children's voices from the nearby play ground. HAZ sits smoking a cigarette on his own. He looks over Warsaw and the river.

HAZ: Liquid spine.

He smiles and, reaching into his back pocket, removes a few sheets of crumpled paper and a pen.

HAZ: *(Reading)* Dave is a... Dave, as we know is... Can't swear. Grandma's still alive... Prat. A plum, a plonker and a pillock... And... Something funny like that? P's... Alliterate - Funny.

As HAZ reads from another slip of paper. BLANKA appears with a pack of cigarettes. She stops behind him and listens.

HAZ: 'Reminisce. Try a fun anecdote. Rack your memory. Mine the history of your friendship'... Well... Dave, the prat, and... me... *(Thinking)* When I think back... A prat and a plum and a... Think back... When I think back to all of my memories with Dave... The... Renault... The old Renault... The car. 1992... In 1992.

HAZ looks out to the playground. Pause.

BLANKA: This is best man speech?

HAZ: What?

BLANKA: What is the Renault in 1992?

HAZ: I'm trying to smoke.

BLANKA: In Polish.

(Beat)

HAZ: Speer-deerj.

BLANKA: *(Smiling)* Nearly.

She looks at him and smiles, he looks away. Pause.

BLANKA: Yuri was upset.

(Pause)

BLANKA: He could have called police.

(Beat)

BLANKA: Or I could.

(Pause)

BLANKA: We could have lost our jobs for not checking your gun.

HAZ shrugs and takes a long drag on his cigarette.

BLANKA: That was a lie. It's happened before.

(Beat)

BLANKA: Stag do from Wolverhampton. Groom lost his left eye. Rubber bullet.

(Beat)

BLANKA: I learn now. Always go to firing range *before* you get them pissed.

(Beat)

BLANKA: *(Motioning to the hotel behind them)* They are getting ready to go out.

HAZ nods. BLANKA sits a little too close, but she doesn't move.

HAZ: Look-

BLANKA: You want to get ready too?

HAZ: After my fag.

BLANKA: I'll get you very drunk tonight.

HAZ looks at her.

BLANKA: So, what is this car in 1992?

HAZ looks away.

HAZ: I'm not really up for talking.

BLANKA: Why not?

HAZ: I'm just smoking-

BLANKA: I just want to know this car-

HAZ: Why should I want to tell you?

BLANKA: What's wrong with me?

HAZ: Well, for starters, I don't know you.

BLANKA: Perfect. I am perfect then. *(Beat)* Strangers are the best people to talk to.

HAZ: What?

BLANKA: Someone on streets or waiting for a bus. Anyone. What can they do but listen?

They can't judge you. Our parents were wrong – we should always talk to strangers.

She pats his leg in jest. HAZ stares at it. Her hand stays there a little too long and she smiles at him.

BLANKA: So, you were about to tell me about 1992.

Pause.

HAZ: When were nine, we found a car by the train tracks. And we tried to make it work.

Pause.

BLANKA: That's it?

HAZ nods.

HAZ: That's it.

(Beat)

BLANKA: That's shit. (*Beat*) Do you want to know any more Polish?

HAZ: What?

BLANKA: Polish. You want to know some more Polish?

HAZ: Not really.

BLANKA: Say 'chcesz kurwa'.

HAZ: What?

BLANKA: I teach you a few things and then I leave you alone.

HAZ: Just leave me alone.

BLANKA stares at HAZ.

BLANKA: Let me teach you one more thing.

HAZ stares. Succumbs. Nods. BLANKA smiles.

BLANKA: Chcesz kurwa.

HAZ: Shesht Kuruva.

BLANKA: (*Smiling*) Yes.

(Small pause)

HAZ: What does that mean?

BLANKA: See that statue there?

HAZ: What?

BLANKA: Straight ahead. Through there. Next to the... green. The man and the children.

HAZ: What about it?

BLANKA: That is the Janusz Korczak Monument.

HAZ: Right.

The acoustic guitar in the background slowly turns into a Rabab, playing strange, dream-like music.

BLANKA: In the ghetto, Korczak has an orphanage-

HAZ: / Jesus, I just want a fag-

BLANKA: No. This is a story about your countrymen. So, long story short. His orphanage has 192 children. Then, when the Nazis start the Solution, they march them all to Treblinka. For extermination. Korczak is pardoned. He can stay. But he doesn't. He goes and dies with them. Because they're his. Even though they're not.

The children in the playground sound louder. HAZ listens to the Rabab and rubs his leg.

HAZ: Can you hear...

BLANKA: I used to be a tour guide in Warsaw. I have degree in Modern History. But business can... It is hard. And I have to earn. I get a job with stag parties and hen nights. And boys holidays. And is more money here. It is good. I swap Warsaw history for cheap alcohol and *kurwa*. *(Beat)* But the Monument, I keep in my tour. Because it makes me happy. The statue. And Korczak's bald head. *(Beat)* So, the first group I take out, from Manchester, is like you. I show them Korczak. And they make joke. At bird shit on his head. But this is fine. They see the statue. And we leave. And I am happy. Because that part of the tour is for me. *(Beat)* And, happy, we eat and drink. A lot. And it is five o'clock in the morning. And everything is blue. And two men, from my group, who are like you. Funny men. I like them. Two are standing on the statue. And they piss on it. Because they can. And I watch them. *(Beat)* So. There you go. Waste.

BLANKA strokes the slither of wood between her and HAZ.

BLANKA: I give the groups what they want. I just. *Kurwa*. Instead.*(Beat)* You know, for all the statues of heroes in the world. As beautiful as they are. And what they mean. They can't help you much. Not when you need it.

HAZ: What?

BLANKA: *(Staring out)* Who cares?

HAZ: About what?

BLANKA: Coffee shops and strip clubs.

HAZ: What?

BLANKA: I have a friend from University. Elana. Who has degree in modern history like me. She has masters degree. Beautiful too... Now, she works in London. In a sauna. For stupid, married men.

BLANKA stands.

BLANKA: I might go to London.

HAZ: What?

BLANKA: There are plenty of statues there.

HAZ: What are you talking about?

BLANKA: For later. Ask me 'chcesz kurwa'. You remember it.

(Beat)

BLANKA: But it will cost you. Understand?

HAZ: No, I don't.

BLANKA: And you're right. We need you. *(Beat)* You should get changed.

HAZ stares at BLANKA.

BLANKA: Change.

She exits. HAZ looks out to the playground and listens to the Rabab. He closes his eyes.

Scene Five

Split Scene: Bench outside Hotel Phoenix and Hotel Phoenix, Room 22. 6pm.

JAMES sits on his bed in Room 22 of the Hotel Phoenix. He has just washed and his hair is still wet. He is dressing himself in a smart shirt, trousers and shining black shoes.

Outside, HAZ sits on the bench, staring to the playground, where he can hear the Rabab.

JAMES: 'He sat in a wheeled chair, waiting for dark,
And shivered in his ghastly suit of grey,
Legless, sewn short at elbow. Through the park
Voices of boys rang saddening like a hymn,
Voices of play and pleasure after day,
Till gathering sleep had mothered them from him.'

HAZ looks at his notes and speech.

JAMES: 'About this time Town used to swing so gay
When glow-lamps budded in the light-blue trees
And girls glanced lovelier as the air grew dim,
— In the old times, before he threw away his knees.
Now he will never feel again how slim
Girls' waists are, or how warm their subtle hands,
All of them touch him like some queer disease.'

Behind HAZ, a small BOY enters. He has dark skin and wears an old white jumper, grey shorts and sandals. He stands staring at the playground.

JAMES: 'There was an artist silly for his face,
For it was younger than his youth, last year.
Now he is old; his back will never brace;
He's lost his colour very far from here,
Poured it down shell-holes till the veins ran dry,
And half his lifetime lapsed in the hot race,
And leap of purple spurted from his thigh.'

HAZ turns and sees the BOY. It stops him dead. JAMES stops also, sensing something in the room. HAZ stands slowly and faces the child. JAMES slowly continues getting dressed. HAZ steps towards the BOY. They are both frozen solid, staring. JAMES bends to pull up his trousers as HAZ bends down on one knee to study the BOY. The BOY looks at HAZ. HAZ

stares at it, and, as soon as HAZ even moves his hand an inch, the BOY quickly turns and runs away. HAZ stares motionless. JAMES, nearly finished, stands and sorts his hair.

DAVE: *(Off)* Hey!

Both JAMES and HAZ hear him.

DAVE: *(Off)* Let's go!

HAZ and JAMES stare at each other. A dull drum, like a heartbeat, is heard. The lights fade to black.

Scene Six

The Cadillac Bar. 8 pm.

A nice bar. Swish. Expensive. DAVE and BEAR, in smart attire, and HAZ, in his t-shirt and trousers from before, sit at a small table downstage with a pint each and three plates of food. They are waiting to eat. A numb drum and bass dance track pulses throughout the scene. DAVE stares at HAZ.

HAZ: I'm-

DAVE: Don't talk to me about it.

HAZ: We've been sat here in silence for fifteen minutes.

DAVE: And it's been the best fifteen minutes of this stag do so far.

(Beat)

HAZ: Look. Dave. I'm... I've got some... I don't know-

BEAR: Can we just start? / I'm hungry.

DAVE: / What?

HAZ: I didn't mean to scare him-

DAVE: Yes you did, Haz. Of course you meant to scare him-

HAZ: Dave, I didn't know what I was doing-

DAVE: You pointed a gun at my brother-in-law!

HAZ: He's not your -

DAVE: How did you know it wasn't loaded?

HAZ: I knew-

BEAR: Is he having the world's biggest poo? I'm wasting away here.

DAVE: What were you thinking? What were you doing?

HAZ: I don't know.

DAVE: You're apologising. OK? You are apologising when he gets back.

BEAR: Jesus. How awkward is this / evening going to be?

DAVE: / OK, Haz? That's my brother-in-law-

HAZ: He's not your brother-in-law-

DAVE: He will be. *(Beat)* You're saying sorry, and you're going to leave him alone from now on. Understood?

HAZ nods. Small, awkward pause. JAMES appears, sees HAZ and moves over tentatively.

BEAR: Oh, THANK CHRIST! We can start now.

DAVE: James. You alright?

JAMES nods and sits. He doesn't make eye contact.

DAVE: They're keeping your meal heated, mate. Hang on. Wait, Bear.

DAVE exits.

BEAR: OH FOR FUCK'S SAKE.

HAZ: Alright.

BEAR: *(To JAMES)* How do you shit for that long?

HAZ: Bear.

BEAR: I'm starving.

HAZ: Just wait.

BEAR: I want to eat my Bigos!

HAZ: You are a big oss, now just fucking wait.

HAZ tries to smile at JAMES.

HAZ: Feel... relieved. Mate?

BEAR: You must have shit your body weight Goblin.

JAMES: Don't call me Goblin.

BEAR: What?

JAMES: Don't you dare call me that again.

BEAR: It's only a nickname.

JAMES: I don't like it.

BEAR: Just relax. You're the Goblin. That's established. So-

HAZ: It's nothing nasty-

JAMES: My name is James.

BEAR: And my name's Alex. But I haven't been called that for fifteen years. Even my mum calls me Bear. Haz's real name is Harry.

HAZ: Harold, actually.

BEAR: Harr- Harold? Well, I only know him as Haz. That's what we all know him as. And have done for years. *(Beat)* Can't choose your nicknames, mate. It's not that bad. Come on. We've all got one.

JAMES: Dave doesn't.

BEAR: That's 'cos he's the boring one. The groom. Of course he doesn't have a nickname.

HAZ: We used to call him Gypsy. Can't remember why.

Small pause. JAMES's eyes dart. He is breathing heavily.

JAMES: Why am I called Goblin?

HAZ looks away.

BEAR: Well.

JAMES: Well?

BEAR: Well. *(Beat)* Because you're a spastic. Mate. *(Beat)* That's what Haz said.

JAMES stares at HAZ.

HAZ: I don't think I said that.

JAMES: What?

BEAR: It's just a laugh, James.

DAVE appears with a plate of food.

JAMES: I'm not spastic, Harold.

DAVE: What?

JAMES: I said. I'm not spastic.

HAZ: Don't call me that.

JAMES: You don't like it?

BEAR: We know you're not actually spastic-

JAMES: So why do you call me Goblin?

BEAR: It's just a name-

JAMES: It's not.

BEAR: It's just words.

DAVE: What's going on?

JAMES: No, David. You don't even have a nickname.

DAVE: What?

JAMES: *(To BEAR)* I'm sick of your words. Your words are filthy. I feel sick when you speak. I want to spit.

BEAR: What?

JAMES spits on BEAR's food.

BEAR: Oi!

DAVE: / James!

JAMES: / There are your words. *(He spits again)* Spit!

DAVE holds JAMES's arm.

DAVE: Stop that-

JAMES: *(Hitting his arm away and growling)* DAVID!

HAZ: What are you fucking doing?

JAMES: *(Spit dripping from his mouth)* What are you doing, Harold?

HAZ: Don't fucking call me that.

JAMES: You know, Harold, you spend so much of your life shoved into women's boobs and things that you never notice what's actually going on around you or what anyone thinks about you. But I notice. I see how scared you are.

HAZ: Scared of what?

JAMES: Me.

HAZ: *(Laughs)* Fuck off.

Silence.

HAZ: What are you fucking talking about?

JAMES: How's the best man speech going, Harold?

HAZ: What? Fine.

JAMES: That's good. Good. *(Beat)* So is mine.

(Beat)

HAZ: What?

JAMES: My speech is going well too.

DAVE looks away.

HAZ: What speech?

JAMES: My best man speech.

HAZ stares between JAMES and DAVE.

HAZ: *(Scoffing)* Fuck off, best man-

JAMES: David?

HAZ stares at DAVE. Pause.

DAVE: We thought it would be nice.

(Beat)

HAZ: We?

DAVE: Ella. And her parents. And I-

HAZ: James is your best man?

DAVE: You both are.

HAZ: We both are.

(Pause)

HAZ: I've known you for twenty-five years, Dave.

DAVE: I know-

HAZ: And you've known him for, what, two?

DAVE: Six.

HAZ stares at DAVE. JAMES smiles. HAZ's anger builds in the silence.

HAZ: What are you fucking smiling for?

DAVE: Haz-

HAZ: What the fuck are you smiling for you spastic cunt-

DAVE: 1992-

HAZ: Fuck that, Dave. *(Beat)* David.

JAMES smiles broader.

HAZ: *(To BEAR)* Wanna get a beer, Bear?

BEAR: I want to eat-

HAZ: Wanna get some coke?

BEAR looks at HAZ.

DAVE: Haz-

HAZ: Blanka can get us some.

JAMES: Cocaine?

HAZ: Bear?

BEAR: I just wanna eat.

HAZ: We'll do that too. Come on.

HAZ stands and starts dialling on his phone. BEAR looks at DAVE and JAMES.

HAZ: Bear.

BEAR stands.

HAZ: *(To DAVE)* See you in there.

The drum and bass gets louder, the table disappears, there are bright, confusing strobe lights and the stage is suddenly filled with movement and sound.

Scene Seven

Bar NoBo. 11 pm.

Loud, deep, tense music - Blinded By The Lights (Nero dubstep remix) booms around the theatre. Confusing lights. It is intimidating and loud. DAVE and JAMES push their way through a crowd and move to a dark corner.

DAVE: Are they even in here?

JAMES: I don't know.

DAVE: It's too dark.

JAMES: I don't like it here.

DAVE: We'll be OK, mate.

A scream offstage. A smash of glass. They sway drunkenly drinking for a moment.

DAVE: What a fucking mess.

JAMES: I know.

DAVE looks out and notices something.

JAMES: What?

DAVE: I thought I saw Blanka.

JAMES: Blanka?

DAVE: Yeah. And Haz.

JAMES: Were they together?

DAVE: Yeah.

JAMES: What were they doing?

DAVE: I don't know if it was the-

JAMES: I like her.

DAVE: What?

JAMES: I like her. Blanka. A lot. She's-

DAVE: Do you?

JAMES: Yes. I like her. A lot.

DAVE: You've only known her for a day-

JAMES: I know, but I like her-

Another scream. Men shout.

DAVE: *(Looking for the noise)* Jesus Christ.

JAMES: What?

DAVE: Let's just stay by the bar.

As DAVE and JAMES move off, BEAR and HAZ enter downstage. HAZ holds two glasses of cloudy alcohol - one with a blue straw, one with a green straw.

HAZ: *(Holding up the green-strawed drink)* Green's for Goblin. Alright? Green goblin.

BEAR: *(Taking the glass)* Alright.

HAZ: That one.

HAZ takes out a small plastic packet filled with cocaine. He quickly pours some into the drink and then checks his surroundings. BLANKA enters.

HAZ: Alright.

BEAR: It's gonna fucking kill 'im.

HAZ: No it won't. Just hurt him a bit.

BEAR: Fucking hell, Haz.

BLANKA: Hello.

BEAR: Jesus.

HAZ: Alright?

BLANKA: Are you having some coke with us?

BEAR: Maybe later.

BLANKA: The best tour guide in Warsaw, right?

BEAR: Right, yeah.

BLANKA: I told you.

HAZ: Right Bear, you big fat faggot. Take it over. I'll see you in a bit. Green one.

BEAR: You going to the toilets?

DAVE and JAMES enter upstage. A smash and a cheer from where they came.

HAZ: Yeah.

BEAR looks at HAZ, who smiles and shrugs his shoulders.

BEAR: With Blanka?

HAZ: Yeah.

BEAR winks.

HAZ mouths 'maybe' at BEAR.

BEAR: Try to film it on your phone.

BLANKA: What?

HAZ: *(Laughing)* Alright mate. See ya in a bit.

BEAR: Right. See ya Blanka.

HAZ smiles and looks at BLANKA. He gestures to exit with him. They go as BEAR moves to DAVE and JAMES.

DAVE: There you are.

JAMES: Did you see that?

DAVE: Where's Haz?

JAMES: I want to leave.

BEAR: He's off with Blanka.

JAMES: That man just punched that girl in the face.

DAVE: Where are they?

JAMES: Is she bleeding?

BEAR: Toilets.

DAVE: Fuck.

JAMES: All down her dress.

DAVE: They're...

BEAR: Probably.

JAMES: On her legs.

DAVE: No, he's not.

BEAR: I think they are, mate.

JAMES: What?

BEAR: He's fucking her in the loos.

JAMES: What? Who?

DAVE: I hope he's quick.

JAMES: David. Who?

BEAR: We could go and check out the alleys. Get one ourselves.

DAVE: Fuck off, Bear.

BEAR: What?

DAVE: I'm not going to a fucking alleyway in Warsaw. The diseases knocking about-

BEAR: He bought you two a drink.

DAVE: Did he?

JAMES: Who did?

BEAR: Haz, you spas-

BEAR's sentence drifts off as he looks at the drinks.

BEAR: He wanted to say sorry for losing it at you both.

DAVE: Does he?

BEAR: Yeah. You know what he's like.

BEAR holds the green-strawed drink out.

BEAR: *(To JAMES)* There y'a-

DAVE: So he should.

DAVE takes the green-strawed drink.

DAVE: About / time he said sorry.

BEAR: / No, mate. That's not yours.

DAVE: What?

BEAR: Green one's his-

DAVE: What's the difference?

BEAR: I-

DAVE: What?

BEAR: Green's for-

JAMES: Why?

JAMES takes the blue-strawed drink.

Another smash of glass. Two men are shouting. Fighting. BEAR is distracted.

JAMES: This is horrible-

DAVE: Right, James. One, two, / three-

BEAR: / Wait a second, Dave-

DAVE downs his drink. JAMES drinks his drink, spluttering and coughing.

DAVE: JESUS! What is that?

BEAR stares.

JAMES: I think it's vodka and coke.

DAVE gags a little.

DAVE: Tastes like hairspray.

BEAR: You want some water?

JAMES: It's sick.

BEAR: *(Moving off)* I'll get you a water.

DAVE: No. Bear. I'm alright, mate.

The strobe lights flash and cut out.

Scene Eight

Toilet Cubicle. 11.10pm

HAZ and BLANKA are in a tight, sweaty toilet cubicle. It is bathed in a sickly green light. Graffiti, liquids and solids garnish the three walls. Music beats off, fast and repetitive. HAZ has just done a line of cocaine on the toilet seat.

HAZ: Fucking hell.

BLANKA: Good?

HAZ: It stinks.

BLANKA: We're in a toilet.

HAZ: Don't do it on the lid, it's got something slimy. Wet. You got a card?

BLANKA: *(Going into her bag)* There is lots of drunken women here.

HAZ: Yep.

BLANKA: Do you like it?

HAZ: S'alright.

BLANKA: You want to go to a strip club?

HAZ: I don't know. Fuck, that's just hit.

BLANKA: I can show you.

She touches his hand. He pulls away.

HAZ: Do some.

BLANKA: Do you have a card?

HAZ hands her his wallet. BLANKA stares at it for a second and then takes out a credit card and pours some cocaine. As she snorts, she makes a loud piggish grunt. They burst into huge, breathless laughs.

HAZ: You pig!

BLANKA: What was that?

HAZ: You snored it in.

BLANKA snorts as she laughs.

HAZ: Fucking warthog.

HAZ leans against a wall as BLANKA laughs and shuts his eyes.

HAZ: Fuck me. That's hit. You'll get it in a sec.

BLANKA stops laughing and stares at HAZ's crotch.

HAZ: Haven't done it for four years, so...

Pause.

BLANKA: I'm drunk.

HAZ: Are you?

BLANKA: Are you?

HAZ groans yes.

BLANKA: I'm wet.

HAZ: What?

HAZ opens his eyes to see her staring at him with intent. She holds up his wallet.

BLANKA: Do you remember your Polish?

HAZ: What?

BLANKA: Your Polish.

HAZ concentrates. Beat.

HAZ: Spin-darj.

BLANKA: Which means?

HAZ: *(Smiling)* Fuck you.

BLANKA: And, the other one?

HAZ: Oh I don't fucking know. I don't remember it.

BLANKA: Chcesz kurwa.

HAZ: Chee?

BLANKA: Chcesz kurwa.

HAZ: Cheech kooza?

BLANKA: Nearly.

HAZ: What does that mean then?

(Beat)

BLANKA: Didn't I tell you?

HAZ: No.

BLANKA: It means 'do you want to fuck?'

HAZ stares at his wallet. Small pause.

HAZ: Feel it / yet?

BLANKA: / That's what it means.

HAZ stares at her. She moves closer to him.

HAZ: OK.

BLANKA: So-

HAZ: So?

BLANKA: You have money.

HAZ: Hand us my wallet.

BLANKA: Chcesz kurwa?

HAZ: I don't know what-

BLANKA: How much money do you have?

HAZ: The wallet.

BLANKA looks in his wallet.

HAZ: Oi-

BLANKA pulls out a twenty euro note.

BLANKA: Twenty euros.

HAZ: Give me that.

HAZ snatches his wallet, but BLANKA holds the note away from him.

BLANKA: For this I can suck your cock.

HAZ: What?

BLANKA: I suck your cock. For twenty euro.

HAZ: You're a whore?

BLANKA: No. I just fuck my groups. Sometimes. For money.

HAZ: Your groups?

BLANKA: Not all at once! What am I?

HAZ: I don't-

BLANKA: Actually. I fucked two at once. From Wolverhampton.

HAZ: What?

BLANKA: They give me two hundred euro.

HAZ: Blanka.

BLANKA moves right up against HAZ.

BLANKA: Do you like me?

HAZ: I...

BLANKA: It's OK. I'm a stranger, remember? I won't judge.

HAZ: What?

BLANKA: I could be anyone. You have thought about me?

HAZ: Not really-

BLANKA: You're little friend has. He looks at me-

HAZ: What?

BLANKA: I can go for him.

HAZ: No.

BLANKA: So, you want me?

HAZ: I don't know.

BLANKA: *(Slowly, seductively moving close to his face)* Don't worry. I don't know you.
And you don't know me... We're just strangers...

HAZ, slightly unnerved, tries to handle her proximity.

HAZ: You want to know what the 1992 Renault is about?

She shuts his eyes and shushes him.

HAZ: He fell off the car. Dave. And I left him.

HAZ opens his eyes.

HAZ: I left him for two days. His head was cut.

BLANKA puts the twenty euros in her bag and nods.

HAZ: We were nine. And I left him. I was so scared he was dead.

BLANKA shuts his eyes again.

BLANKA: We're strangers.

BLANKA moves in to kiss him. They kiss passionately for a moment. BLANKA opens her eyes and slowly moves her hand to his crotch. She is suddenly stopped by something. HAZ opens his eyes and stares at her.

BLANKA: You...

HAZ: Don't.

(Beat)

HAZ: *(Moving her hand away)* Don't touch me.

BLANKA: I...

Suddenly and violently, HAZ pushes BLANKA away. He stares at her for a second, clenching his fists.

BLANKA: You haven't-

HAZ punches the cubicle wall and moves to open the door. The lights smash to black.

Scene Nine

Bar NoBo. 11.15pm

BEAR, DAVE and JAMES are standing with drinks. DAVE is gently rocking on the spot, his eyes rolling back and clouding with tears.

BEAR: Dave, mate-

Suddenly, HAZ enters.

BEAR: Haz.

HAZ: What?

BEAR: Haz. Here. I need to speak to you-

JAMES: When are we leaving?

HAZ: Right now.

JAMES: Is Blanka coming?

HAZ: No she's fucking not.

DAVE: Haz?

JAMES: What?

BEAR: Dave's unwell.

HAZ: What?

JAMES: Where is she?

DAVE: I'm-

HAZ: We're leaving. Just us four.

JAMES: We can't leave her-

HAZ: Shut your fucking mouth, Goblin. Yes we can.

DAVE: Sick-

BEAR: Haz, we need to get Dave back to the hotel.

JAMES: We're leaving?

HAZ: Yes.

BEAR: Alright. Dave. Come on then.

DAVE looks at BEAR and leans into him.

HAZ: (*Holding JAMES's arm*) How are you feeling, Goblin? Huh?

BEAR: Haz. I've / got to tell you someth-

DAVE: / (*Slurring*) Let's...

HAZ: / (*To JAMES*) You fucked?

JAMES: Get off my arm.

HAZ: Nope.

JAMES: David-

BEAR: Haz. I need to talk to you about Dave-

HAZ: Bear, just take him back to the hotel. It's only across the river.

BEAR: What?

HAZ: If he's fucked, take him back.

BEAR: But what are you doing?

HAZ: What?

BEAR: Where are you going?

HAZ: Me and James are going for a walk.

JAMES: What?

BEAR: No. Haz, he's not-

HAZ: (*To JAMES*) We'll go for a fag. (*To BEAR*) We're going for a fag.

BEAR: You gonna be long?

HAZ: No.

DAVE: I want to phone Ella.

HAZ: Fuck off. Phone's banned.

DAVE: (*Slurring*) Please.

HAZ: Bear. Take him.

BEAR: (*To DAVE*) Alright, mate. Alright.

BEAR puts his arm around DAVE and helps him walk out of the club.

BEAR: See you in a bit then-

HAZ: Yeah.

JAMES: Where are we going?

HAZ: (*Exiting with JAMES*) For a walk. Near the river.

Smash to black. Something in the music fails and short-circuits. The music resumes, but is numb, quiet and distant, as if suddenly miles away.

Scene Ten

A street near the river. 11.45pm

A dark street, lit only by three flickering orange street lights. They hum and flicker. We can hear the club in the distance somewhere. HAZ enters holding JAMES's arm tightly. He stops and stares at the river, taking out a cigarette and his lighter. We can hear someone shouting 'flar' somewhere, but HAZ ignores it.

HAZ: The River.

JAMES: Haz-

HAZ: Cigarette?

JAMES: No. Please. / What are we-

HAZ: / Shut up, Goblin.

HAZ lights a cigarette and smokes it.

HAZ: You can see the playground from here, can't you?

JAMES: Yes.

HAZ: And the bench.

JAMES: Yes.

(Small pause)

JAMES: What are we doing here?

HAZ: Having a fag.

Pause. High-heeled shoes can be heard in the distance.

JAMES: Shall we just go to the hotel?

HAZ: No.

JAMES: Why?

HAZ: We're waiting for something.

JAMES: What?

HAZ: We can't go home until we have a girl.

JAMES stares at HAZ.

HAZ: A girl. To have sex with.

JAMES: A girl?

HAZ: Yes. A girl. For you to have sex with.

JAMES: Me?

HAZ: Yes.

JAMES: What?

HAZ: You're having sex with a prostitute tonight.

JAMES: But-

HAZ: What?

JAMES: I'm...

(Beat)

JAMES: I'm a virgin, Haz.

A moment.

HAZ: I know.

JAMES: I don't understand.

HAZ: You're losing your virginity tonight.

JAMES: Why?

HAZ: Here's one now.

JAMES: But, why am I having sex?

HAZ: Because I can't.

JAMES: What?

HAZ: Because I can't.

JAMES: I don't-

HAZ: Shut up.

STAR, a blond, scantily-clad prostitute enters. She slows and stands smiling at HAZ and JAMES from a distance. She is very young.

HAZ: *(To JAMES)* Like her don't you.

JAMES: Haz-

HAZ: She's young. Looks very young. Pretty. *(To STAR)* Hi. Cheech kooza?

STAR smiles and begins to walk over to them.

JAMES: Haz, what I am supposed to do?

HAZ: Have sex with her.

JAMES: But there are diseases.

HAZ: Well. Let's hope not. Let's hope this one's clean.

As STAR reaches them, the lights smash to black. We hear footsteps running on sand and engines churning. Bullets fly overhead and people shout in Pashto. But even over all of this, we can still hear the BOY whispering 'flar'. Suddenly, a wind rushes towards us - fast, and uncontrollable, picking up speed and mass and, just before hitting, we hear a huge explosion. Then silence. End of Act One.

Act Two

Split scene: Hotel Phoenix. Room 22 and Room 23. 12.15 am.

Room 22 and Room 23 sit next to each other in Hotel Phoenix. They are identical in lay-out: upstage left is a greasy window; upstage right is an old wooden door; centre stage are two horribly-stained single beds and, between them, a chest of drawers, on top of which is a lamp and small wooden phoenix.

In ***Room 23*** a main light illuminates BEAR and DAVE, who lie on the single beds. DAVE is asleep and BEAR is drinking a beer and reading a glossy lad's mag. A sick-stained bin lies next to DAVE's bed.

We can hear heavy rain outside and a loud train rattle past nearby. BEAR looks at DAVE, and then back to his magazine.

In ***Room 22***, an open suitcase sits on top of a bed and there are clothes strewn about the room. The lights are off.

Footsteps can be heard offstage, and, after a moment's fiddling with a dodgy door handle upstage left, HAZ, JAMES and STAR enter ***Room 22***.

HAZ: Here we are. The honeymoon suite.

HAZ switches on the lamp. He seems aroused.

HAZ: For the honeymooners.

As STAR and JAMES tentatively enter, HAZ kicks clothes around the floor, pushes the chest of drawers out from between the beds and near the door, and, eventually, pushing the two single beds together, whilst constantly talking.

HAZ: Just let me... (*Hurts himself*) FUCK-

JAMES: Haz-

HAZ: WHAT?

JAMES: I think we should just pay Star and send her off-

HAZ: Don't be fucking stupid. She's here now. And so are you. *(Beat)* Have a drink.

JAMES: What?

HAZ kicks the suitcase towards JAMES.

HAZ: Vodka in there. Paint stripper. *(Beat)* You like vodka, Star? Vodka?

STAR: Vodka? Yes.

HAZ: Yes, you do. She likes vodka, Goblin.

HAZ finally gets the two beds together.

HAZ: Made for two.

JAMES: Haz-

HAZ: You two. Drink.

JAMES reaches into the suitcase and retrieves a full bottle of vodka. It is huge.

HAZ: Go on. Big swig.

JAMES breaks the seal and undoes the bottle as HAZ pats the bed for STAR. She sits.

STAR: You both want me?

HAZ stares at her.

HAZ: Show me your tits.

STAR: I not know...

HAZ: *(Miming her top)* Your tits. Pull your top down.

JAMES: Haz-

HAZ: Drink. *(To STAR)* Show me.

STAR pulls down her top as JAMES swigs the vodka. HAZ stares at her body.

JAMES: *(Finishing swig)* Haz... *(Coughs)* Jesus!

JAMES coughs again and trips into the door. STAR laughs and pulls her top back up.

JAMES: (*Aggressively, to STAR*) Don't laugh at me. DON'T.

HAZ: Alright, shut up.

HAZ sits with STAR on the bed as JAMES takes another swig.

In Room 23, DAVE wakes and groans. BEAR gets off his bed.

BEAR: You alright mate?

DAVE sits and rolls his head. His cheeks start to fill.

BEAR: (*Moving to DAVE*) Dave? In the bin, mate. In the bin-

DAVE vomits. Some goes in the bin. Most of it covers BEAR.

BEAR: Fucking... grim.

BEAR cleans the vomit and settles DAVE over the bin.

In Room 22, HAZ strokes STAR's shoulder and smiles at her. She bites her bottom lip.

HAZ: You want a drink? Star. Vodka?

STAR: Yes.

HAZ: Goblin.

JAMES: (*Still angry*) What?

HAZ: Bring that vodka here.

JAMES, still spluttering a little, hands HAZ the bottle, who hands it to STAR. JAMES moves to the door, but HAZ stands and approaches him fast.

HAZ: Where are you going?

JAMES: I don't know if I want this-

HAZ: You do. You just think you don't 'cos you're thinking with that (*Taps JAMES's head*). Think with this for a bit (*Grabs JAMES's crotch*).

STAR: (*Finishing a swig JAMES*) Good.

HAZ's hand stays on JAMES's crotch.

HAZ: I'm paying for her to fuck you. Alright?

JAMES: (*Staring at his crotch*) Haz, don't-

HAZ: What?

JAMES: Take your hand off!

HAZ: Are you queer?

JAMES: No.

HAZ: You sure you're not queer?

JAMES: Yes.

HAZ: Yes you are or yes you're sure you're not?

JAMES: Yes, I'm sure I'm not. Now PLEASE!

*JAMES knocks HAZ's hand away. HAZ smiles at him. In **Room 23** DAVE spits in the bucket.*

HAZ: Then you'll be fine fucking our Star here.

STAR smiles.

JAMES: I don't want to-

HAZ: Look at her.

JAMES: It's not / that.

STAR: / You have money?

JAMES: What?

HAZ: Yes, we do. How much?

STAR: (*To JAMES*) What you want?

JAMES: What do I...?

HAZ: What do you want, Goblin? Sex? Maybe anal. I wonder if she – do you do anal?

STAR: Anal? Yes -

JAMES: NO! I don't want-

HAZ: (*To STAR*) He wants sex. Just plain. How much?

STAR: Sex?

HAZ: Yes.

JAMES: No.

STAR: Is fifty euro.

JAMES: / I..

HAZ: / Fifty? OK.

STAR: You pay / now?

JAMES: / Haz...

HAZ: No. I pay after. After sex. OK? / After.

JAMES: / Haz, please-

STAR: Fifty?

HAZ: (*Taking out wallet*) Fifty. / After.

JAMES: / Jesus.

HAZ: After. OK?

STAR: (*In Polish*) As long / as I can have some vodka.

HAZ: / OK?

JAMES: Haz...

STAR drinks again.

HAZ: Just look at her. Look at how beautiful she is.

*HAZ and JAMES watch STAR take a huge gulp whilst BEAR rubs DAVE's in **Room 23**.*

BEAR: You alright, mate?

DAVE: I'm... spinning... Bear.

JAMES: Haz. I can't have sex with her-

HAZ: Don't start that.

JAMES: I won't be able to.

HAZ: Why not?

JAMES: I just won't be able to.

HAZ moves to JAMES and grabs the back of his head, hurting him.

HAZ: Yes you fucking will, Goblin. Don't give me that shit. / Don't do that. It all works down there. It's all fine. So don't you fucking-

JAMES: / Please. Haz.

HAZ: Stop fucking whining and fuck this girl. Now.

JAMES: *(Beginning to get upset)* Haz.

HAZ: And you're going to film it for me.

JAMES: What?

HAZ gets his phone out of his pocket.

HAZ: Film it.

HAZ puts the phone in JAMES's hand. JAMES stares at it.

DAVE: *(Slurring)* I'm sick.

STAR smiles at JAMES and takes another swig.

BEAR: I know, mate. I'll phone Haz.

DAVE puts his head in his hands, looking up every now and then to spit in the bucket. BEAR grabs his mobile off the drawers and sits on DAVE's bed, dialling.

HAZ: (To STAR) He films. Films. (Mimes filming) You two.

STAR nods, giggles and swigs. JAMES holds the phone out.

JAMES: I can't-

HAZ: You know how many lads I helped in Afghanistan?

JAMES: What are you talking about?

HAZ: Brothels. Prozzies. A lot were virgins. Like you.

JAMES: I'm not / filming this-

HAZ: They thanked me-

JAMES: Stop.

HAZ: What?

JAMES: Please stop-

HAZ: What the fuck are you talking about?

JAMES: I don't know what's wrong with you but -

HAZ: (Aggressive) STOP THAT. You stop that right now. This isn't about me. I'm trying to help you here. Like I helped them out.

JAMES: But-

HAZ: No. Be fucking grateful.

STAR finishes drinking and drunkenly places the bottle on the side of the bed. HAZ's phone rings.

HAZ: Give me that.

JAMES hands him the phone and turns back to STAR.

HAZ: Sit next to her. *(Answering phone)* What?

BEAR: Where are you?

JAMES slowly moves to the edge of the bed.

HAZ: What's up?

BEAR: Dave's ill.

HAZ: Well he's a big boy-

BEAR: He had the drink.

HAZ: Well, he probably had a few / drinks-

BEAR: / He had the one with the green straw. The one for James.

HAZ: Goblin.

JAMES: What?

DAVE: What?

(Beat)

HAZ: The green one?

BEAR: Yes.

HAZ stares at the connecting wall.

STAR: *(To JAMES)* Are you ready?

JAMES shakes his head.

HAZ: Dave drank it?

BEAR: YES. I tol-

HAZ: I'll be in in a minute.

BEAR: Where are you?

HAZ: I'm tucking Goblin in.

HAZ hangs up. He is suddenly worried. BEAR moves back to DAVE.

STAR: (To HAZ) He not ready.

HAZ: (To STAR) No. He's ready. (Beat. To JAMES) You're ready.

HAZ moves off, stops and gives his phone back to him.

JAMES: No, Haz, I'm not. HAZ...

JAMES gets up and runs to him, holding the phone out.

JAMES: I can't film thi-

HAZ punches JAMES in the stomach. Hard. JAMES falls into a heap on the floor.

HAZ: You're ready.

STAR giggles nervously. HAZ heads to the door.

HAZ: Have another swig or two. I'll be next door.

HAZ stops by the door.

HAZ: Let's hope she's clean.

HAZ exits. Horrible silence. We hear just how heavy the rain is. JAMES drops the phone and slowly stands to get his breath.

*After composing himself outside, HAZ enters **Room 23** and stands in the doorway, staring at BEAR. BEAR shakes his head and looks back to DAVE.*

*In **Room 22**, JAMES regains his breath and rests against the window. He is whimpering. A loud train rattles past nearby.*

HAZ: (Moving to DAVE) You alright? You bloody drunkard.

DAVE: I'm sick.

HAZ: You drank too much, didn't you?

BEAR: Haz-

HAZ: *(To DAVE)* S'alright mate. I'm here now, eh? *(To BEAR)* You're in the way, Bear.

BEAR stands and moves to his bed, staring at HAZ, who strokes DAVE's hair.

HAZ: Just like old times, eh?

In Room 22, STAR takes another swig of vodka.

STAR: You want to fuck me?

JAMES stares into space. He doesn't make eye contact. He just swallows hard. Small pause.

STAR: *(Placing the bottle by the bed)* You see me naked?

JAMES: No.

STAR starts to unbutton her shorts. In Room 23, BEAR looks at his lad's mag.

STAR: I get naked for you.

JAMES: No. Don't.

STAR: I get wet.

JAMES: I wish you wouldn't.

She continues.

BEAR: Cor-

JAMES: Stop that right now.

STAR stops and smiles.

STAR: It OK.

JAMES: No. It's not. *(Beat)* I'm... I can't do this...

BEAR: *(Turning his magazine to HAZ)* You seen her? Alicia.

HAZ doesn't look.

STAR: You fuck me?

JAMES: No.

BEAR: She's Czech.

JAMES: I need a drink.

BEAR: 19.

JAMES storms over, grabs the vodka bottle, and moves away again.

BEAR: Yeah fucking right, 19. In five years, maybe. Alicia.

STAR: OK?

JAMES: No.

STAR: No?

JAMES: NO.

He takes a huge swig, coughs and sprays vodka over the door. STAR giggles.

JAMES: *(Spluttering)* DON'T LAUGH. What did I say? DON'T! *(Beat)* I don't like it when you laugh... So...

JAMES gets his breath and takes another swig. STAR watches him, smiling. JAMES continues to drink, holding back the urge to vomit.

DAVE: Haz.

HAZ: Yes mate?

DAVE: I'm sick.

HAZ: Bear, get Dave a water.

BEAR: From-

HAZ: From the bathroom.

BEAR: With / what?

HAZ: / Fill a coke bottle or something.

BEAR goes to his bag and gets out a half-empty coke bottle. He exits to the bathroom as HAZ shushes DAVE.

JAMES: (*Quietly*) Turn off the light.

STAR: ...The?...

JAMES: The light. (*Pointing at the lamp*) Turn off the lamp.

Slowly, STAR moves to the drawers and turns off the lamp. The room is only partially-lit by an outside street lamp, which glows orange, accompanied by the deep blue shadow of rain.

STAR: Is nice. Rain.

JAMES stands for in the dark, breathing deep. STAR calmly sits on the bed.

STAR: Listen.

DAVE: Haz.

HAZ: Yeah?

DAVE: Ella.

HAZ: What?

DAVE: She's...

HAZ: What mate?

STAR: Hear?

(Beat)

DAVE: Ella's pregnant.

HAZ stares at DAVE, stunned. We hear the taps going next door. HAZ's eyes well up. Pause.

HAZ: Is she?

DAVE: A boy.

(Small pause)

DAVE: I wanna call him Harrison.

(Beat)

DAVE: Harry.

After a moment, BEAR enters and hands HAZ the water. HAZ nods at him and, as BEAR moves back to the bed, HAZ helps DAVE drink some.

JAMES: *(Softly)* I haven't been... with a woman... before.

STAR lies down. Small pause.

JAMES: They confuse me. *(Beat)* You do. *(Beat)* As hard as I try.

(Beat)

JAMES: I read poetry. And I know jokes. I've seen *Mock the Week*. And I don't look too bad.

JAMES stares at her.

JAMES: *(Quietly)* But you are all so cruel... At school... And University... Laughing. At me. I knew. *(Beat)* And all so fucking stupid. *(Beat)* I know you understand me. *(Beat)* You understand every word.

STAR just stares at him.

JAMES: You're all whores, aren't you?

JAMES sits on the end of the bed and hangs his head. STAR watches him.

JAMES: Why can't you just be... nice?

DAVE: Haz.

For fear of crying, HAZ can only muster a hummed 'yes?'

DAVE: On the plane.

HAZ nods.

DAVE: You said... the... The boy.

HAZ stares at him. BEAR sits up slowly.

DAVE: Did you mean Harry?

HAZ shakes his head.

DAVE: Did you know about him?

HAZ: No. Mate. *(Beat)* Not him.

(Pause)

DAVE: Then. Who?

HAZ begins to cry.

HAZ: Afghanistan.

(Pause)

HAZ: I... I was in an armoured car on the outskirts of Kabul. Convoy. Two cars in front. A truck in front. Armoured. With eighteen men inside.

JAMES wipes his eyes.

HAZ: I didn't see the blast. But I heard it. All I saw were all those lads flying apart, mid air like acrobats. Young. My age. Younger. And I don't remember stopping or getting out or running, but I was there, with them. And they were dead. Six of them lying there. And the rest on fire. Or smoking. They'd climbed out of the windows. And some... were missing... Arms. Legs.

STAR moves slowly to JAMES and begins to caress his shoulders. He half-turns his head and smiles.

HAZ: They were shooting north west of the road, from a dune, about 600 yards away. Just rifles, but they were hitting bodies. I kept hearing bullets hitting things: metal, sand, then sometimes flesh, thudding like dough.

STAR gently touches JAMES's face, and softly kisses him.

HAZ: So I pulled them away. Eleven of them. One at a time. These... Good lads. Behind the van.

STAR sits next to JAMES. They look at each other.

HAZ: And I went for the twelfth. I go to pull the twelfth away, a young lad, nineteen or something, and his arm gives way. I pull but the tissue was soft, like wet bread, it gave way. So I had to pull from his shoulders. And that's when I got hit in the leg.

JAMES pushes STAR's hair behind her ear and looks at her.

HAZ: Behind the knee. It entered here and shattered the bone and I fell. And then, another bullet through my ankle. It was hot. I remember how hot it felt, like I'd burned myself really badly.

Shaking, JAMES kisses STAR.

HAZ: And I just threw up. I couldn't do anything else. *(Beat)* I was lying next to a body. I couldn't tell who it was.

STAR takes off JAMES's top.

HAZ: Not the same boy. He was burned black. His gums were gone, just teeth and...

STAR removes her top.

HAZ: Red... I tried to pull myself, but I couldn't. I think I gave up.

JAMES stands and takes off his trousers as STAR hitches up her skirt.

HAZ: And then I saw the convoy behind. The two cars. They moved silently, rippling in the heat. Not a mirage. Real. Help. They were coming fast.

JAMES and STAR awkwardly kiss again.

HAZ: And I was lying there just hoping, hoping, hoping. *(Beat)* And then I realised...

JAMES and STAR move under the covers.

HAZ: I realised... the guns had stopped... Silent. *(Beat)* I was dead. I thought I must have died, I thought that was it. But it wasn't. They'd stopped for something else. A little boy. *(Beat)* This little lad, maybe eight or nine, was walking from the dunes with his hands up. He was... He was Afghan and had on this ... massive white robe. Very light. It caught the air like a sail. And he didn't look real. He was just walking slowly towards me with his hands up. And I waved at him. I *waved*. I ignored the convoy. I just waved at him. Like he was my own. Like my lad. But he kept his hands up. The convoy pulled up near. He was walking slow. Five guys got out. Holding guns. They pointed them at him. And I shouted. No. No. *(Beat)* I didn't even know if he was real or not. But I told them to leave him alone. And the boy got nearer. And they got nearer. And I saw... He was terrified.

We hear cries of 'flar'. JAMES sits up, as if he has heard it also.

HAZ: He pulled up his robe. And he was crying. And then he said something. Flar. Flar. Father. It sounded like a song. It was beautiful. Flar. And his robe rose... And I just saw wires. Underneath. Black wires across his brown skin. There was something taped to him. Black tape and black wires on his stomach. And he was singing this song. And he was crying too. And I looked at his face. His skin was perfect. Smooth. Young. He was looking up. And I looked at the wires. And his hand moved to his heart.

STAR touches JAMES's shoulder, but he softly shrugs her off. He is listening to something.

HAZ: I didn't see it hit him. Just like I didn't see the blast before. I didn't want to maybe. My brain wouldn't let me. I just saw the blood on the sand. And on his little legs.

STAR grabs for JAMES's neck, but again, he shrugs her off.

HAZ: And then I heard the gunshots again. The convoy was shooting and was being shot at and there were bodies falling and flying. And I looked back at the boy. With a hole in his head. Through that perfect brown skin.

STAR moves to JAMES's crotch. He shoves her off, but she persists.

HAZ: *(Getting loud)* And he was still looking up. He sounded like he was still singing.

STAR feels something wet. She brings her hand up and starts to giggle.

HAZ: I leant in to listen. I could hear him moaning. Dying. This little voice. Eight years. Flar.
Flar

JAMES: Don't laugh at me.

STAR still laughs and rolls away.

HAZ: So I... held him... And as he was there, in my arm... like my own. Like he was my lad... Calling me his father. I was his dad...

JAMES: Don't laugh.

JAMES strikes the back of STAR's neck. She lets out a whimper. The following happens as HAZ speaks: STAR rolls on to her back and, still laughing, slaps JAMES's face. Sobbing, climbs on top of her, holding her down. She scratches at his face and neck, but JAMES has glazed over and stares through her.

HAZ: And then I got hit again. In the groin. The hip. I don't remember feeling it. I just saw blood fly up. Like a fountain. It rushed up towards me. Too much. Gushing. I put my hand up. But it came like a wave. And it covered us both. And then I blacked out.

JAMES: *(Crying and spitting his words)* Stop laughing at me! Stop it. Stop it. Stop-

*HAZ stops for a moment to collect himself. The slowly lights dim even more in **Room 22**. JAMES places his hand over STAR's mouth and presses his weight on to her and, as they struggle, his hands move from her face to her small neck. She whimpers and kicks out. They go silent as JAMES squeezes her neck harder and harder. JAMES is crying. He is in a dream and collapses on top of her. We can't see or hear anything in **Room 22**.*

*In **Room 22**, BEAR and DAVE stare at HAZ. They are all crying and DAVE has sobered somewhat.*

HAZ: I don't know how much of that is even real. How much is memory and how much is dream. Because it doesn't really feel like either.

(Small pause)

HAZ: And then I was in England. Three months ago. I wake up and they told me that I was lucky. *(Beat)* My cock was in pieces and I have to piss in a fucking shopping bag. But I was lucky. Can you fucking imagine? That's lucky?

(Beat)

HAZ: So I can't ever have sex again.

(Beat)

HAZ: And I can't ever have kids.

(Beat)

HAZ: And holding him was the nearest I'll ever get to holding a lad of my own.

(Pause)

HAZ: And I'm so fucking... embarrassed.

DAVE: *(Softly)* I'm... I'm sorry.

HAZ dejectedly shrugs. Beat.

HAZ: Don't be.

(Beat)

DAVE: Haz... I can't...

(Beat)

BEAR: It's nothing to be ashamed about, mate.

(Beat)

HAZ: That little boy...

HAZ shakes his head. Pause.

BEAR: But he would have...

HAZ looks at BEAR.

HAZ: I wish he had.

(Long pause)

DAVE: Where's James?

(Beat)

HAZ: In...

Pause. HAZ thinks. Then, as if realising something, he inhales a large breath and suddenly bolts up. DAVE and BEAR stare at him.

HAZ: I'm sorry, Dave.

*HAZ goes to the door of **Room 23**.*

HAZ: I really am.

As HAZ exits, DAVE and BEAR sit in shock, not looking at each other.

*HAZ taps on the door to **Room 22**, before slowly entering the room. JAMES moves under the sheets.*

HAZ: *(Quietly)* James. James.

DAVE stares at the bucket as BEAR lies on his bed, staring at the ceiling.

HAZ: James. I'm sorry.

He sees his phone on the floor and treads over it.

HAZ: *(Looking at the phone)* I'm so sorry, mate.

He picks up the half-empty bottle of vodka and walks to the bed.

HAZ: James?

He taps JAMES, who moves off of STAR's body, quietly sobbing.

HAZ: What-

HAZ sees STAR. Long pause.

HAZ: Is she dead?

JAMES: (*Softly, through tears*) I told you... I couldn't.

HAZ looks at the body and then JAMES. He stares at the vodka.

HAZ: She's...

HAZ stares at JAMES, who is crying and breathing heavily. Long pause.

HAZ: Go next door.

(*Beat*)

JAMES: What?

HAZ: Go next door.

JAMES slowly stands up. His knees are weak.

HAZ: I'm sorry, James-

JAMES: What are you...

HAZ: Just go in. Be quiet for a bit. And tell them I did it.

JAMES: What-

HAZ: Just do it.

JAMES: But I kil-

HAZ: I did it. Alright?

JAMES stares at HAZ.

HAZ: Now. Go next door.

JAMES nods and shuffles off.

HAZ: Oh... And... Before I forget...

HAZ moves to JAMES and reaches into his pocket. He fishes out a mobile phone and hands it to him.

HAZ: Dave's phone. Tell him I'm lifting the ban...

Through tears, JAMES takes it.

HAZ: Tell him to phone Ella. Later.

JAMES nods.

HAZ: Alright.

*JAMES exits. For a moment, HAZ is left, staring at STAR. Then, as JAMES enters **Room 23**, HAZ bursts into action, placing the vodka by his phone on the floor whilst moving to the door, locking it, before moving to the chest of drawers, which he pushes in front of the door.*

*JAMES stands in the doorway of **Room 23**.*

BEAR: Fuck me. (Standing) Gob- James. Are you alright, mate?

DAVE: (Turning to see JAMES) James?

*BEAR moves to JAMES and leads him in the room, shutting the door behind him. In **Room 22**, HAZ pushes the nearest bed in front of the door and the chest of drawers.*

DAVE: What's the matter, James?

DAVE stands and moves towards BEAR, who sits JAMES on the end of his bed.

BEAR: You're shaking.

DAVE: Where's that water, Bear?

BEAR starts to look for the water. HAZ looks for something else to jam in front of the door. Tries the suitcase on its side. It isn't effective. BEAR finds the water and brings it over.

DAVE: What's happened, James?

JAMES shakes his head.

BEAR: Where's Haz? Was he with you?

DAVE: Have you been next door?

JAMES shakes his head and drinks some water.

In Room 22, HAZ moves to STAR. He stops dead and stares at her.

Slowly, JAMES pulls out DAVE's mobile phone from his pocket and holds it to him.

DAVE: Is that...

BEAR: What about the ban?

JAMES: Lifted.

HAZ slowly, almost ritualistically, pulls the white sheet over STAR's body. He then turns, and sits at the end of the bed, staring at the joining wall.

DAVE: Lifted?

BEAR: Where's Haz now?

JAMES shakes his head.

BEAR: What?

DAVE: What's happened?

Pause. HAZ nods his head. JAMES slowly points at the wall. DAVE and BEAR look. As if seeing them HAZ looks away, defeated. He sees his phone and the vodka on the floor.

DAVE: What?

BEAR: Haz is next door?

DAVE: What's happened?

BEAR: Has he done something to you?

HAZ slowly moves to the floor and kneels. JAMES shakes his head.

BEAR: Why are you crying, mate?

JAMES: I couldn't...

HAZ picks up the vodka and undoes the lid.

DAVE: Couldn't what?

BEAR: Haz is in there now?

JAMES nods. BEAR exits hurriedly. HAZ takes a large swig of vodka.

DAVE: *(To JAMES)* Drink it down, mate.

*BEAR reaches the door to **Room 22** and tries the handle. Locked. He bangs the door. Hearing the knock, HAZ accidentally spills some vodka on his lap. He stares at it.*

BEAR: *(Off)* Haz. HAZ. You alright, mate? Open the door. Haz.

DAVE: Is Haz OK?

JAMES shakes his head. HAZ continues to stare at the vodka on his lap. He looks up, and slowly puts his phone in his pocket.

BEAR: HAZ. *(Banging the door)* Haz, mate.

DAVE: What's happened, James?

JAMES looks at DAVE.

BEAR: *(Exiting)* Fucking-

*BEAR re-enters **Room 23**. HAZ carefully pours vodka down his torso and legs.*

BEAR: He's locked himself in.

BEAR moves to the connecting wall and knocks.

DAVE: Fuck.

(Beat)

JAMES: He did it.

DAVE: What?

BEAR: Did what?

Slowly, HAZ sits on the end of the bed.

DAVE: James?

JAMES: He did it.

JAMES shakes his head and crumbles again.

DAVE: Bear. Phone someone.

BEAR turns to DAVE. HAZ pours vodka over STAR and the bed behind him. DAVE moves to the wall.

DAVE: Bear. Go and ring someone, now.

BEAR: What?

DAVE: Call someone.

BEAR: I don't know who.

JAMES: No, don't.

DAVE: Go and ask the reception girl. Say it's an emergency. Go.

BEAR: But-

DAVE: GO

BEAR exits. HAZ finishes the bottle over his head, gasping as if suddenly refreshed.

DAVE: HAZ! Haz mate! James. What's he doing?

JAMES shakes his head. HAZ places the vodka bottle beside the bed.

JAMES: He did it.

DAVE: Haz. Let's talk about it. Whatever it is, mate. Let's talk.

HAZ reaches into his pocket and removes a crumpled piece of paper – his best man speech. He smiles, un-wraps the paper and looks at it.

DAVE: Listen. I need you to open your door. OK?

JAMES: David.

DAVE: Just do that for me.

HAZ retrieves his mobile phone from his pocket and clicks a few buttons.

DAVE: 1992. Mate. Please. 1992.

HAZ looks at the wall for a moment. Then stares at the phone again. He clicks a button and pulls the phone to his chin.

HAZ: Recording.

He clicks a button, then, studying the phone again, clicks another button.

RECORDED VOICE: Recordi-

HAZ clicks a button.

HAZ: OK.

DAVE: Please mate. Haz.

JAMES: David. David.

DAVE turns and stares at JAMES.

JAMES: He killed her.

DAVE is silent. HAZ clicks another button and gently lays the phone on the bed next to him.

HAZ: So. This is my best man speech.

Staring at JAMES, DAVE moves away from the wall, and sits on the bed.

HAZ: I'm sorry I'm not there today. *(Beat)* I really am sorry. Ella, I bet you look beautiful.

*DAVE cries and **Room 23** fades to darkness.*

*HAZ sits alone, removing his Zippo lighter as the dim lights in **Room 22** start to fade out.*

HAZ: *(Playing with the lighter)* I'm told that I'm supposed to reminisce about the groom here. And I'm told, this bit is dedicated to funny stories about him. Try to embarrass him. And make you laugh. And all of you are probably hiding your faces right now. Ella, I know you will be. *(Beat)* But don't worry. I think I've embarrassed him enough. So. There's. This...

We hear sirens outside.

HAZ: (*Carefully*) We have laughed a lot. Me and Dave.

HAZ smiles as the lights fade to black.

Epilogue

Easyjet flight from Warsaw to London. The following day. 9pm.

The lights fade up to reveal a near-empty bile-orange Easyjet airplane, smoothly cruising at thirty-three thousand feet above the glimmering lights of a city. Everything onboard is in silent slow-motion. DAVE, lit by a small overhead light, stares out of the window. BEAR sits next to him, looking forward at the fold-down table in front of him – his light is not on. The aisle seat is empty, but lit. As they sit, we hear HAZ's voice. It is his recorded speech. In the background we hear police sirens getting nearer and louder.

HAZ: I remember summers mainly. Sun. Having grass fights. And grass itch that goes with it. And holding our breath under water. And running until our feet hurt and climbing things and just. Being kids. Toothless and. Sunburnt. And not noticing time. And seeing what happened when you threw fruit at concrete and sweets and all that. And then growing up a little bit, and finding football, and girls, and how good winters were too, and riding about on bikes and listening to music... And then discovering alcohol. And liking girls even more. And going out and topping up dad's gin with water. And laughing... Until we hurt... And the countless nights. Beer. Takeaway. Fifa. Match of the Day. Then out. Town. Cobbles. Drink. Flashing lights and getting lost and... just... enjoying being young...

We hear car tyres screeching and police sirens in the distance.

HAZ: And in 1992. The cream Renault Four. The Renault we found in the woods. Abandoned. Broken. Near the train line. It was. Big. And broken.

DAVE looks up and above the seats in front of him.

HAZ: The old Renault Four. Our wagon. Spaceship. And we spent four days trying to make it go again. Remember? We were trying to drive to... wherever. Explore. Just run away. Together. *(Beat)* Just me and you. It was a laugh.

JAMES approaches DAVE and, slowly sits in the aisle seat. DAVE looks out of the window, his eyes glazing.

HAZ: And then. You fell. You fell off the roof and you went through the windscreen and I didn't know because we were nine. I was. Scared. Dave. So I went. Home. And I left you. In

the dark there. And I didn't tell anyone until the next evening. You were. I thought you were dead. But you weren't. I just. I was only nine. And you must have been more scared than me. You must have been.

The police cars arrive outside.

HAZ: And I promised you, I promised you that next day that I'd do anything you wanted for that. I owed you everything for that, for being such a bad mate and leaving you. I'd do anything you wanted for the rest of our lives. Because. Nineteen-ninety... two. Was. Well. You've used it.

In the recording, BEAR and DAVE are arguing with the police though nothing can be made out.

HAZ: And then, when I went away... well... you found Ella. And thank God. Because... I was gone and... She's perfect. She's perfect, mate. And I couldn't be happier for you... Both of you. And it's about time now. That you left. With her. And. Leave me.

JAMES fiddles with the air con. The argument in the background of the recording settles.

HAZ: But with all that... time... and distance. More than twenty years. And continents between us. And life experience and... *(Beat)* Deep down, Dave. To me. Is still that nine year old, trying to make that car go. Laughing. With a bloody tea cosy on his head. You fucking pillock. Oh fuck. I said I wouldn't swear. And I just did it again. Sorry Nell. Sorry. *(HAZ coughs)*

JAMES shuts his eyes. In the recording, HAZ takes a long pause and looks around the room.

HAZ: Anyway. You're my best friend. And you always will be.

Somewhere in the recording, we can just make out tiny footsteps and a small voice whispering 'flar'.

HAZ: And now, Ella, it's your turn to have him... I'm handing him over. All yours.

HAZ sees the BOY. His breathing becomes heavier and he sighs.

HAZ: Look at him. *(Pause)* Sounds like 'fly'. *(Pause)* I hope you remember us as kids, Dave. Remember me like that.

Police have entered the building. Heavy, booted footsteps on thick carpet, like sand.

HAZ: Fly.

The police are at the end of the corridor now, shouting in Polish.

HAZ: So. Let's raise our... Here's to you Ella. I bet you look beautiful. Good luck. And Dave. *(Beat)* I love you, mate. *(Beat)* I'm going to miss you.

We hear metal clinking. The Zippo lighter lid opens.

HAZ: To the bride and groom.

We hear a whispered cry of 'flar' again and, as the police run loud and fast towards the door, we hear a train rattle past, crashing like a bomb. This noise grows and spreads to the plane. It becomes real.

The lights smash to black.

END.

Critical Analysis of *Phoenix*

Introduction

Whilst consulting my notebooks in order to revise my playwriting seminars and track the origins of *Phoenix*, sourcing the seeds of plot, content, themes, form and structure, I discovered one small, scribbled note in the bottom corner of the back title page. It read: ‘Amsterdam. Stag-do. Prostitute killed.’ Though appearing like the perverse annotations of a psychopath, this note was actually made in hurried inspiration after watching the reality television programme *Boozed Up Brits Abroad*, in which a crew follow three stag-dos on sordid pilgrimages to cheap and debauched lands (predominantly in Eastern Europe). Though terrible, trashy late-night television, and an even worse advert for the modern British male as drunk and ‘hung-over Imperialist’ (Waters 2011), *Boozed Up Brits Abroad* is actually a grotesquely interesting character study and frighteningly explicit comment on contemporary British subcultures and their proclivity for sex, alcohol, and destruction. I was instantly interested in the interactions, hierarchy, and almost homoerotic ‘jokes’ (mainly involving nudity) that these male groups rely on, where every action is charged with an undercurrent of sexual tension, machismo and peer pressure. The question that I wanted to ask was: in groups like this, how far is too far? This programme was the accidental beginning of *Phoenix*, a birth through fire whose flames were soon to be fanned by the aggressive, precise and constant intense works of David Mamet, specifically, in his seminal, twisted everyman play, *Edmond*.

Edmond has perhaps affected me more than any other play whilst studying playwriting. Its style, form and content, as well as Mamet’s refreshingly honest approach to writing and blunt theatrical ethos, is surprising, fresh and completely original. Focusing on the titular character’s journey through the gritty sub-culture of a metropolitan city, where Edmond is a symbol of middle-aged, middle-class white crisis in a multicultural and sexually and ethically confused contemporary world, Mamet writes a short, vicious and unrelenting stationendrama play that is, in its essence, an expression of the perennial and perpetual human fear of identity, age and change in a ‘world [that] is disintegrating.’ (Kane 2004, p. 85), a world which Mamet says is ‘*spinning itself apart... a kind of hell.*’ (Jones 1991, p. 51).

'The world seems to be crumbling around us. You look and you wonder if what you perceive is accurate. And you are unsure what your place is. To what extent you are the cause and to what an effect...' (Mamet 1996, p. 245-246)'

This opening speech acts as a starter pistol for our anti-hero and, from then on, Edmond and the audience are propelled through short, sharp and simple episodic scenes (never longer than five minutes), which come at an break-neck speed and which are packed with viciously explicit language and content. In each scene, Edmond effortlessly overcomes small obstacles, creating units of action instead of thought and process, where, as Steve Waters's writes in his book *The Secret Life of Plays*:

'[Mamet]'s characters... inhabit a quasi-behaviourist universe where physical actions precede intentions, even create them... [Edmond's] encounters are rendered with the barest of preliminaries, as we get to the core sexual or racial conflicts that lie barely concealed in urban life... Brevity is the mapping of power in the play. For Edmond's nihilism makes him uniquely powerful, and drives each interaction forward.' (Waters 2010, p. 21-22)

In *'David Mamet in Conversation'*, Mamet talks about his affinity with writing in the episodic form and theorises that it may be something about *'the human attention span... [that] you should make your point, then get on to another scene.'* (Kane 2001, p.220). So, in trying to emulate *Edmond's* form, whilst also relating to some of its themes (identity-crisis, male violence, carnal pleasures and base desires), and with *Boozed Up Brits Abroad* still burned on my brain, I began writing *Phoenix* (originally titled *The Warsaw Pack*), as an ode to the modern British male, hapless travels and turbulent machismo, where brevity would be key and which would very much make a point and then move on.

Emulating *Edmond*: Early Ideas and First Draft

The Warsaw Pack was to be an experiment of form. From our first playwriting seminar, we were encouraged to *'write the play that we may not be able to write without so much help'* (Waters 2011), to push ourselves and explore the craft of playwriting in a controlled and guided environment. I wanted to experiment with mixed forms, where my first act would utilise Mamet's theory about the brevity of a scene fulfilling the human attention span (which seemed fitting for my subject matter) - demonstrating a large reign of territory, character and

carnage - juxtaposing my second act, where I would enforce a slow, suspenseful tempo, grinding the action to a halt and making the characters reflect on the barbarism and destruction which preceded. In a later seminar, David Eldridge would say that *'the form of the play can tell its own story'* (Eldridge 2010), where the form isn't so much the play itself (as if it were a gimmick or trick) but actually the mechanism for presenting the mood of the play - a vehicle for communicating the unsaid or the unseen. There is something in a play's 'DNA' (a much used phrase on the course which refers to the make-up of a play, both consciously constructed and subconsciously, almost heritably, structured), which relies on form, and it is something to be experimented and handled with care – which I discovered upon writing.

My premise was simple to start with (my *Edmond*-esque *'Stag do. Prostitute killed'*) but soon evolved and presented me with larger, more problematic challenges (we often discussed the idea that *'the bigger the obstacle - the bigger the objective - the longer we need to work it out'* (Waters 2011)). In my original brief/pitch, I wrote about five 'stags' from Birmingham and their travels to Warsaw (changed from Amsterdam for a stronger culture clash, it's violent and turbulent history and also, a warning shot for the upcoming Euro football completion which kicks off in Warsaw in the summer of 2012). Once there, Dave (the groom), Haz (the best man), Diddy (a loveable idiot – soon to be cut), Bear (an ignoramus) and Goblin (Dave's brother-in-law-to-be) *'carelessly smash into the city, drinking, groping, and vandalising as they go, unfortunately upsetting the wrong person, and, after a night of blissful ignorance to the city's culture, history and inhabitants, especially its women, the five men are confronted... taunted, bullied, tortured and taught. It is here where the "Phoenix City" burns again. Quite literally.'* (White 2010). Originally, I wanted to write two polar-opposite acts: Act One (to be titled 'Praga Piss-Up'), which would be comic in tone and substance and very much follow Mamet's *Edmond* model in episodic form and structure; and Act Two (to be titled 'Bar Hydro') which would *'suddenly ground the whistle-stop tour of quick, fun locations and build a pressure-cooker atmosphere in a cramped, dark underground space.'* (White 2010), very much emulating alcohol-based slow burners such as Eugene O'Neill's *The Iceman Cometh*, Conor McPherson's *The Weir* or even Edward Albee's *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?*. Utilising some of the techniques in these seminal play, I would move *Phoenix* *'quite drastically, from a farcically paced, multi-location, multi-*

character comedy to a much darker comedy with a violent and tragic outcome.' (White 2010). Though it is far easier said than done.

Whilst writing the first few pages I realised that this form was hugely problematic and effected the story that I wanted to tell. It would have communicated the mood and tone of the piece, but logistically, it was unsuitable for a play with five main characters. The quick, episodic form of *Edmond* was effective when displaying one man's sordid journey - we only have to travel at that velocity with one focus, unmoved by others' opinion, story-line or input - however, with *The Warsaw Pack*, I had to contemplate five Edmonds, each with their own agendas, stories, backgrounds and motivations. Even just playing and organically sparring with words whilst writing early notes (I often 'improvise' characters' voices as if acting myself), the characters were pulling in different directions, adding layers of tension, confused momentum, and focus. My play couldn't be about the journey of one man, it was about a group of men, their journey together and the tensions, the differences, the opposing opinions, desires and motivations that occur therein. This had to be my focus as this was the core of the play - this was what had originally inspired me. I would have to adapt *Edmond*'s form, trying to maintain its violence and exhilarating speed, whilst also moving deeper into the lives of these characters. I decided to utilise longer scenes at the beginning of *Phoenix*, to establish characters, context and plot, before speeding the pace and shortening the scenes more and more towards the end of the first act, as Haz's sanity, patience and moral barometer deteriorates.

An aspect of *Edmond* that I still intended to experiment with was Mamet's plethoric use of character, representing a bustling metropolis - a world which disregards the individual and moves on when the scene is done. In *Edmond*, the 'supporting' characters (30 in all who, except Glenna, are named after a character description or job title, such as 'Wife') come thick and fast and each conceal an obstacle of some sort (usually revolving around money), but as Waters says, their only purpose is to get to '*the core sexual or racial conflicts that lie barely concealed in urban life*' (Waters 2010, p. 21). I admire this simple, epic, almost expressionist form of character, whose only presence are to act as obstacle or catalyst for the group, and in setting up similar fleetingly impersonal and uncongenial exchanges, I hoped to achieve two things: firstly, in ignoring or mistreating the populace of Warsaw as a writer, I assimilate the play with the groups' perspective and focus; and secondly, by building audience expectations

in these brief, menial, and disrespectful interchanges, perhaps even showing them as insignificant, I could then build in a surprising twist when one of the many ‘supporting characters’ actually holds mass importance in relation to the plot, the group and their demise.

I hoped to set this up in the character of Jakob (a character who doesn’t appear in *Phoenix*), an ambiguous, tattooed pimp with twisted morals (his tattoos were actually the inscriptions from his grandfather’s ghetto diary), and one who would be appear at the end of the play to confront, interrogate and mutilate the group. Jakob was a character established near the end of the first act, in a brothel scene where Haz forces Goblin to have sex with a young prostitute, Star. As with the current draft of *Phoenix*, Goblin kills Star, but in *The Warsaw Pack* draft, Jakob finds Star’s body and hunts the men for vengeance, planning to shoot Goblin in revenge for Star’s life (my ‘Jakobean revenge tragedy’). However, in playing with motive and ambiguity, I wrote Jakob with a twisted moral voice, which wasn’t sentimental or condescending, but which was wise in the foul world of the play. An expert in debauchery and the respect and hierarchy that is woven into street law, Jakob would teach the men, not only about Warsaw’s history and Polish subculture, but also in obscure ethics and life-lessons. Writing Jakob also acted as a point of expansion on the relevance of Warsaw as a setting, where its history of bloodshed could be fore-grounded and aligned with the pack’s ignorant ‘conquests’. And thus, I began my research on the Warsaw ghetto, the Nazi occupation, and the ‘Final Solution’, something which I hoped would broaden and add depth, to my play but, unfortunately, overwhelmed the raw, rough, edginess of the original draft.

Jakob: Ghetto Research and Giving Up The Gun

I began my research of the ghetto with history books and personal diaries, the latter becoming invaluable as a writer, presenting the individual experiences, anecdotes and voices of those who suffered and documented. For my second draft of the play, titled *The Phoenix City*, I used extracts from Abraham Lewis’ shocking and heart-breaking *Cup of Tears: A Diary of The Warsaw Ghetto* as accounts on Jakob’s skin:

JAKOB: (*Reading his left arm*) August 7th 1943: I meet an old, grey Jew. 80 years old. He has lost everything – brother, wife and only son – to typhus and Treblinka. We eat. As I say goodbye, he bursts into tears and says: ‘I can’t die. I have to hear the last gunshot of the war, and then live for just half an hour longer.’ We all need something to live for.

(*Small pause*)

JAKOB: (*Showing his chest*) September 11th 1943: We are tiny remnants of greatest Jewish community in the world. (*Showing his left wrist*) 21st October 1943: Why is the whole world deaf to our screams? (*Showing his neck*) October 23rd 1943: Earth, do not cover our blood; let no place be free from our cries. (*Showing his right arm*) December 22nd: I found corpse of a little boy and bury him under dirt. Furious vengeance for this - for blood of a small child! If there is such a thing as justice, let it show itself now. But if only after my destruction, justice appear under the heavens, may its seat be destroyed forever.

(From *The Phoenix City* Draft – 20/01/11)

However, as powerful as it was in Lewin's diary, and as interesting as the tattoos may have been as a motif and action, something in these accounts felt problematic and almost unstageable. I felt as if I was exploiting these diaries in dramatising them, trying to squeeze and manipulate emotion, leading to the dreaded sentimentality which we were warned about during the course. Lewin writes in his diary that:

'In these tragic times, whenever several Jews gather together and each recounts just a part of what he has heard and seen, it becomes a mountain or a swollen sea of misfortune and Jewish blood... They talked and talked and I felt a chilliness and utter despondency' (Lewin 1989, p. 120)

How can one only write a small part of such a large and tremendous tragedy? And how can one only allude to this atrocity in such a small way? Is allusion actually elusion? Is synecdoche enough? I read Peter Weiss's *The Investigation*, and of course found it as distressing and difficult to read as I did the ghetto diaries. However, upon seeing a production of the play (albeit an amateur student production), I could no longer relate to the material. Actors and action overwhelmed the text, making it alien, and I almost felt that it was an injustice - a sentimental wringing and emotional pornography – where the words had lost all reverence and real meaning when performative and false 'emotion' was attached. As David Edgar writes in his book *How Plays Work*: '*Actors act characters acting*' (Edgar 2009, p. 48), and, with *The Investigation*, nothing felt real, honest or true – these actors acting characters acting felt like a betrayal to the text and to the testimonies that it was responsible for. Though this play could obviously not be performed by Holocaust survivors, and these actors were, I'm sure, completely respectful to those people and accounts, the whole exercise felt removed and forced, and, after seeing it, I asked myself: how can one write about the

Holocaust or the ghetto without it completely overwhelming, like ‘a mountain or swollen sea’? How can one connect to and write about these horrors without forcing despondent guilt or sentimental strain? And, to this, I don’t honestly know the answer. I’m not sure if it’s possible to portray the accounts of the Holocaust or ghetto in a few hours of theatre, and if it is, *Phoenix* was not the play to do it. It may have to be mentioned or drawn upon, but perhaps remembering that some holidaying Britons’ completely disregard and ignore their destined country’s culture and history, *Phoenix* was intended to explore the culture-clashes of those who simply don’t care about the cobbles on which they vomit, even if they are the last remaining from the ghetto. Here, I had to present an argument, or at least a strain to an argument, whilst remaining emotionally removed and objective. In involving *Phoenix* too much in the history of something as atrocious and devastating as the Holocaust, I was unintentionally overwhelming and overpowering the real focus - the group - and upsetting the balance previously established in the world of the play. During our course, Steve Waters spoke about ‘*finding what works against the melody of a play*’ (Waters 2011) and utilising this to display argument, explore tensions and vary tone, however, this was too large a resistance, and didn’t just upset the group’s motive, but also the equilibrium of the play.

I decided to thoroughly edit Jakob and his involvement in the play. I read and re-drafted Jakob’s interrogation scene, and, even without the Holocaust back story, the confrontation seemed forced and, worst of all, completely unthreatening. I had an issue with the gun on stage, it felt clunky, unthreatening and obvious. I saw Simon Stephen’s *Punk Rock* and, though I admired his set-up and effective dramatisation of the gun (in the all-to-true portrayal of school shootings, as well as the actors physical performances - flinging themselves through the air when shot), I find that, generally, the use of guns on stage is contrived, unrealistic and theatrically unviable. In May 2011, Brian Logan wrote an article for *The Guardian* called ‘*Hold Your Gunfire: Why I hate waiting for the big bang on stage*’. Logan theorised that the real audience tension is waiting for the theatrical bang on stage, rather than the gunshot in the play, where the guns artificiality is highlighted with spoiler signs like ‘Warning: This performance contains a gunshot.’ The theatres may as well put a time and exact line when this gunshot can be heard, to comfort the audience further, whilst also ruining the surprise as well as the mood and theatricality of the moment. Logan writes about the ease of guns on stage, cutting to unwarranted tension ‘*usually in sub-Tarantino tough-guy capers – it’s instant, unearned tension; a way for everyone involved to feel like Joe Pesci without doing*

the spadework.' (Logan 2011). And I agree - unless delivered with precise expertise (that I am yet to see) the audience do not believe in the gun on stage, and do not believe that it can actually do damage.

So, in researching other techniques for displaying violence on stage, I read a few plays by a contemporary mutilation-master and fellow Mamet-inspired playwright, Martin McDonagh. An expert in grotesque, visceral and often darkly-comic violence, from seeping cat brains and a tortured drug-dealer in *The Lieutenant of Inishmore* to his horrific images of child-abuse in *The Pillowman*, McDonagh, often criticised for his merger of comedy and violence on stage, admits:

'I walk that line between comedy and cruelty because I think one illuminates the other. And yeah, I tend to push things as far as I can because I think you can see things more clearly through exaggeration than through reality' (Russell 2007, p. 3).

However, in developing a McDonagh-inspired darkly-comic yet thoroughly violent interrogation scene between Jakob and the stags (involving a knife and Haz's wooden leg - as a result of a war injury - unbeknown to Jakob), I realised that violence with this intensity and degree of malice had to be justified. I couldn't just bring in exaggerated, comic violence because I enjoy it in McDonagh's writing - it had to fit the world of my play. And what was I 'illuminating' exactly? That people do horrible things to each other? That a violence can penetrate and threaten any group? The more I wrote, the more I realised how superfluous and shallow my Jakob character was - he was, as Brian Logan put it, *'like Joe Pesci without the spade work'*, an overt and hackneyed symbol of teacher and equivocator in a world where neither really should exist (*'Avoid 'lessons'. Remember the Seinfeld mantra: No hugging. No learning.'* (Waters 2011)). I noted that *'the tension, struggle and dramatic climax that are Star's death and Goblin's subsequent verdict should surely come from the group dynamic and relationship. Not an outside threat. It is the group who should tear themselves apart and finally choose who should suffer and sacrifice.'* (White 2011).

Cutting Jakob's interrogation was the beginning of my subtlety action - my attempt to turn everything down a notch and try to rediscover my original intention and focus on the stags' struggle and disruption. However, admittedly, subtlety is not my strong suit - I still need to

learn how to paint in more refined, intricate brush strokes, as well as the large, broad ones - and trying to calm this play down, which felt so erratic and temperamental in my hands, would be a long and arduous process which I would struggle with until the draft presented here. However, after cutting Jakob, I needed a replacement of sorts, so I complicated things even further for myself by trying to strengthen my female perspective in the play. And so, I introduced Blanka, who would change *Phoenix* forever.

Battling With Blanka and Writing The Boy

The world of *Phoenix* is, as James Brown once sang, a man's world, but one that would be nothing without a woman or a girl – though, unfortunately for the wrong reasons. In the beginning stages of the play, I had the men, I had ‘the girl’ in Star (the vulnerable), and I had ‘the woman’ in Pani Krol, the proprietor of Bar Hydro (where Jakob's interrogation would take place) and who I described in my brief as ‘*a large, sweating, swearing beast of a woman*’ (White 2010). Krol was a tough, motherly figure for the men in the second act, who would be amusing, caring, always hard-as-nails, and very aware of exploiting young, drunk, English men. However, in cutting Jakob, I also started to think about cutting Bar Hydro as the place for the play's climax and finale. Originally, Bar Hydro was influenced by the seedy bar in a stage adaptation of David Mamet's *House of Games* (Almeida 2010), and the memorable tavern stand-off scene in Quentin Tarantino's *Inglorious Basterds* (2009), but it soon seemed hackneyed and uninteresting as a backdrop, its set-up contrived, and its purpose irrelevant and unsatisfactory - Krol made little impact on the group, the plot or the mood of the play, and I found her annoying to write and respond to. I also had a major problem with getting Krol in and out of the scene to allow space and time for the interrogation to take place, so, instead of re-working her and the final act, I decided to completely re-write the second act and re-draft a large amount of the first act.

Cutting Krol was easy, but I had a few more issues in cutting Jakob (and his oafish henchman Bolek – whose name I, and the stags, had fun with). I did a lot of research about prostitution in Warsaw (travel websites, online forums for British men who wanted to find ‘escorts’ and prostitutes in Warsaw) and discovered that, though brothels are increasingly popular, road-side prostitution is rife in the capital, also being a common cause of disease, rape, crime and murder. I decided to move Star to the streets (adding even more vulnerability

to her young character) and focused on the men finding their way there. However, I still felt that I needed a strong female voice (this was emphasised more in my personal tutorials with Stephanie Dale) and, at the same time, discussed with Steve Waters the possibility of having a '*Virgil-esque guide, dragging these men through the circles of hell*' (White 2011). The two elements combined to make Blanka - an ambiguous and sexually confused and confusing woman, who blurs morality barriers further, exploiting both the men and herself, for money.

At first, Blanka started with a highly moral, yet strong, funny and sarcastic voice. Her first entrance is a (fairly cheap) joke, which immediately disarms Haz after a particularly misogynistic speech. From the beginning, I enjoyed writing her as Haz's worthy adversary and possible catalyst for romance and/or sexual confusion. It was also fun in setting up expectations within the group – who imagined that Blanka was a man, only to find that, not only is she a woman, but she is just as vulgar, rude and sexually-charged as they are.

I saw Blanka as my new vehicle to deliver some Holocaust back story to the play, though this time, a lot subtler than Jakob's original speech. However, unfortunately, I once again handled this incorrectly and moved into sentimentality and bathos after reading Janusz Korczak's *A Ghetto Diary*, which, like the diaries that I had read before it, brought me to tears. This was the resulting speech:

BLANKA: (*Staring up at an unseen monument*) That monument over there marks a hero soldier. In the ghetto. Janusz Korczak. He did not fight with the resistance or the uprising. He was a soldier of morality. Of human kindness. A saint, you understand?... He ran an orphanage on Krochmalna Street. That is over there. Not ten minutes from here. This orphanage housed 192 little boys and girls... And Korczak loved everyone of them. He called them his children. All 192 of them. He knew every single one. It was said that he spoke to children as if they were adults and adults as if they were children... And when the Nazis came and they made him move his orphans to the ghetto, he made the children survive by playing games. He made them catch the flies that buzzed around their manure and rotting bodies. He wrote a diary and got them to write diaries too. And best of all, he put them in a play. *The Post Office* by Rabindranath Tagore.

A young boy, perhaps five or six, enters with a toy gun. He plays to himself far upstage. Only Haz notices him. Dave listens intently to Blanka.

BLANKA: In the play, a young boy, an orphan, who has been adopted by a poor couple, is confined to his room by a serious illness. He is dying. Shut in from the outside world, he awaits an uncertain future, and dreams of flying to a distant land

where the King's doctor can lead him by the hand and heal him. And, suddenly one day, like magic, like a fire, the doctor appears at his house... and he orders all of the doors and windows of the bedroom to burst open! They smash off their hinges and, as the wind rushes in, the boy's pain disappears, and he sees the stars twinkling outside.

The young boy slowly starts moving over to Haz. Haz is incredibly uncomfortable, but is transfixed and doesn't move.

BLANKA: And this play was performed three weeks before these children marched to their deaths. (*Beat*) On the fifth or sixth of August 1942, Korczak's orphans were ordered to leave the ghetto and board trains to Treblinka. This is extermination camp North-West of here. It kills 800,000 Jews in Holocaust.

The boy comes up to Haz and pretends to shoot him. Haz stands as still as the statue.

BLANKA: Korczak was allowed to live. But he wouldn't ever leave his children. So, that morning when he heard the SS call "Jews out", he lined them all up, in their best clothes, holding their diaries, and he combed their hair. And he cleaned their cheeks. He told them that they were going out in to the country, so they ought to be cheerful and, at last they would be able to fling the doors and windows open, like the boy in the play, and run in meadows of flowers.

The boy touches Haz's hand. He stares at the tiny fingers and the boy's face.

BLANKA: Holding two of the smallest, he opened the doors and marched with his 192 children through the streets of the ghetto. Proudly, they sang whilst one boy played violin. They marched to their deaths with flags and Stars of David. They were escorted by soldiers, whips and dogs, but not one of the 192 children cried out. 192 pure souls, condemned to death, did not weep. Not one of them ran away. None tried to hide. They just marched with their hero. Their Dad.

Pause.

BLANKA: And that statue is for him. And the children.

(From *Phoenix* Draft 2 - 20/04/11)

There is a mantra that is particularly relevant to student life: don't go food shopping when you're hungry. After writing two bathetic and sentimental scenes, only to re-read later and wince, I would apply a similar mantra to playwriting: don't write anything immediately after reading Holocaust diaries. It is not the correct mind set, one becomes overwhelmed with the source material and hyperbole is strife. Similarly to Jakob's tattoo speech, Blanka's words are

adapted from an original diary that were the epitome of raw emotion on the page, but which I didn't have the skills in transferring to the play text or the performable. I misjudged and misrepresented the Korczak diary and communicated it like sentimental pulp (upon the staged reading of *Phoenix* in June 2011, David Edgar commented on the “*oh no, not another 'Holocaust guilt' moment*” and the overt moral voice, which we immediately disengage from as an audience), but I was to struggle with this speech for a while as I thought that Korczak presented not only the vital link to Warsaw's history and Blanka's personality, but also a tangible link to Haz's torment over the dead boy in Afghanistan.

The ghostly 'BOY', who Haz mentions in the opening scene, was always a strong image in my mind whilst writing the play, but it wasn't until Blanka's speech that I was inspired to show him as an actual tangible, Banquo-esque figure of repressed guilt and suffering. In early drafts of the play, the boy is Polish and only reminds Haz of the boy in Afghanistan, but this has since developed into a resonant and significant aspect to Haz's journey, where the boy is a ghost and Haz hears his cries of 'flar' (father in Pashto) throughout the play. Actually, even though Haz was always a focal point within the group, it wasn't until I had a meeting with Stephanie Dale that I realised that *'the play is Haz - His mind-set and self-destructible path'* (Dale 2011), and things started to make sense. Almost as if Haz had set up the stag-do to get away from this boy and his thoughts, thus putting such emphasis on the holiday's success, Haz became a more desperate and unstable character within the play, and a much more likely and realistic source of action and conflict. I later saw Simon Stephen's *Motortown* (which I think has similarities to my play – even, quite strangely, a reference to breaking one's neck in a plane crash), and felt that Haz paralleled the destructive character of returning soldier Danny, though, with *Phoenix*, Haz's descent is subtler, more of a surprise (as we see Danny's violent mentality from the first scene) and eventually fills the hero status which he could never previously properly accept or acknowledge.

Blanka also represents a challenge to Haz's sexuality. I had it in place that he was impotent and disabled from the beginning, but no-one ever challenged his sexual prowess to demonstrate or give hints at his injury until his revelation in the second act. Blanka, then, could serve this purpose, approaching Haz when at his most vulnerable for a sexual exchange. To this, I originally wrote a long, reactionary speech by Haz on sex and judgement, which ended with this:

HAZ: And sex is the simplest of all. It is. So don't tell me that life isn't just about sex, because I'm afraid that sex is *all* that life's about. Whether we're here to consummate a marriage, or multiply, or just to make the days go past, it's all about sex. (*Beat*) And someone like you - who can have sex and never worry about it going away - well, why should you worry?

(From *Phoenix* Draft 2 – 20/04/11)

However, as with some of my early writing, the speech was superfluous, gushing and overt – giving too much away, when holding back is key. Haz's reaction to Blanka and sex needed to build so that the audience suspects a problem (thus also slightly nullifying his blatant misogyny and crude outlook), but doesn't know what, for sure, is wrong. Here, ambiguity was paramount. Eventually, I developed it so that Blanka could carry the Korczak strain as well as the sexual assault on Haz, and the answer was subtlety, ambiguity and apathy – Korczak was a hero of the past (now forgotten because of her focus on money and tourism), and sex is now an everyday and casual prostitution, which is just a means to an end. The Blanka that appears in this draft of *Phoenix* is one that used to dream of instilling change and revolution in the hearts of the tourists and pop-in-imperialists, where sexuality, wit and manipulation was her concern, but who is now beaten and battered by time and trying. Perhaps the Blanka in the early drafts was a Blanka of old: aggressive, manipulative, strong-willed – and, though some of these qualities remain, they have now been suppressed and she has succumbed to apathy. She is strong, but her priorities have changed to money and survival, and I think we should feel for her and her burnt-out flame.

Blanka is also vital to *Phoenix* in the representation of the outsider's perspective and influence, specifically in her discovery of Star's death in earlier drafts of the final scene - one of the most difficult and re-drafted scenes in the plays development.

The Scene Six scenario: Edward Bond's *Saved* and How to Write a Murder

Since my proposed premise of *Phoenix*, I was advised to read Edward Bond's *Saved*, paying particular attention to the infamous Scene Six (where a group of young men stone a baby to death in a park), where I may have picked something up from Bond's use of language, gang mentality and horrific, unstoppable violence. *Saved*, like *Edmond*, is a play about the search for meaning and existence in a harsh world, where violence is perhaps the only way of communicating with other human beings. Moving from stichomythic language (where the

'irresponsibly-optimistic' (Bond 1979, p. 5) protagonist Len, moves through relationships with sexual-partner Pam, her family and violent peripheral friends) in mundane scenes of working-class South London, to strange choric language during Scene Six, where bored youths Fred, Pete, Colin, Mike and Barry share one language of violence and one blood-thirsty voice:

PETE: Try a pinch.

MIKE: That ought a work.

BARRY: Like this.

He pinches the baby.

COLIN: Look at that mouth.

BARRY: Flippin' yawn.

PETE: Least it's tryin'.

MIKE: Pull its drawers off.

COLIN: Yeh!

MIKE: Less case its ol' crutch.

PETE: Ha!

BARRY: Yeh!

He throws the nappy in the air.

Yippe!

COLIN: Look at that!

They laugh...

BARRY: Gob its crutch.

He spits.

MIKE: Yeh!

COLIN: Ha!

He spits.

MIKE: Got it!

PETE: Give it a punch.

MIKE: Yeh less!

COLIN: There's no one about!

PETE punches it.'

(Bond 1979, p. 66-67)

Here, Bond utilises the chorus to remove individual thought, identity or resistance. The group become animalistic and pack-like, losing idiosyncrasies in their collective longing for malice and murder. There are no pauses, no time for contemplation, and Bond doesn't give the audience time to shy away or think about what is happening, he just presents it as fast, uncontrollable and irreversible.

Though I wasn't necessarily inspired by Bond's choric language in Scene Six, I did appreciate the effect of the violence and the display of male machismo. Originally, I didn't show Star's death, just showing Jakob's reaction after inspecting the brothel:

Jakob goes inside. Bolek lights up another cigarette and takes in a large lungful. For a few moments, the audience are left with just Bolek coolly smoking. After a minute or so, horrible sounds of chaos emit from inside. Bolek, at first doesn't know what to do, he opens the door, standing in the doorway, checking both the brothel and the alley. This is unsettling. Something smashes, a man screams, fast footsteps, something falls, Jakob shouts, a woman cries out, sobbing, moaning, another smash, many footsteps, someone is hit to the floor, another man shouts, Jakob shouts and runs down the stairs. He flies into the alley way, taking Bolek with him.

JAKOB: *(In Polish)* Where are they? Where the fuck did they go?!

BOLEK: *(In Polish)* What has happened?

JAKOB: *(In Polish)* It's Star! It's Star! That mother fucker! *(He grabs Bolek)* There's blood everywhere. Where did they fucking go?

(From The Phoenix City Draft – 20/01/11)

In Act Two (Bar Hydro), I went on to describe Star's death through Jakob:

JAKOB: I guess. Your friend. The fourth. The boy. The virgin. He is scared and weak of women. He goes into room. Star is there. On the bed. Naked. Wet. Touching herself. She smiles at him. A beautiful smile. He walks to her. Shaking. She touches him. His leg. His hip. His thigh. His cock. He shakes. She soothes. But something is wrong. He is shy. He has small cock or he cannot get hard for Star and he goes red. And Star tries again. But it doesn't work. His face burns. And Star laughs. A beautiful laugh.

HAZ: This didn't happ-

JAKOB: And then the virgin snaps. His red face. His eyes burn. And his hands. He cannot stop his hands. He grabs her. Her neck. To stop her laughing. She tries to scream but his hands are too fast. He puts something in her mouth. Something hard. A wallet. A hard black wallet. He shoves it into her throat. He continues. He takes

out knife. Sharp metal. He stabs through stomach. In face. He cuts her mouth. The beautiful mouth that loved laughing. It laughed too much. He stabs it again, misses, stabs the wallet. He cuts her forehead, her ear, her shoulder, her stomach, her leg, her hip, her thigh, her cunt. He stabs her cunt four times. He fucks her cunt with knife. It bleeds. On his hands. So he wipes his hand on bed sheet. On her hair. Her beautiful hair. He takes knife and stabs her cunt again, through bone. He stabs her stomach again. And again. And again. And then he gets up. And turns. He cries and he looks at her, dying. And he goes. He walks out.

(From *Phoenix* Draft 1 – 04/04/11)

Luckily, I cut this with the second act. However, by not showing Star's death or the interaction between Goblin and her, Goblin's motive and the reasons for her death seemed unclear and forced – not ambiguous and mysterious. Steve Waters and Stephanie Dale challenged me to write the unseen scene, but perhaps stopping before the murder itself, to build the tension and explain Goblin's reaction. I wrote the scene and cut before the violence, very much thinking about Moira Buffini's note of '*telling the story on the cut*' (Buffini 2011), where the energy of story-telling can come from '*entering a scene at the latest possible point and exiting a scene as soon as possible*' (Waters 2011), however, *Saved*'s sixth scene was stuck in my mind, and so, I experimented with writing Star's murder. Though it can be torture for the audience to watch (I felt almost sick when watching *Motortown*'s Danny torture and eventually kill Jade (similar to Star in youth and vulnerability)), I felt that, in showing the groups' sexist, violent and misogynist 'games' and threats (which are crude, but always empty and meaningless) against an unflinchingly horrific murder and act of sexual mutilation, I could, as McDonagh said, 'illuminate' their twisted 'humour' and ethics. This violence should appear as sudden, uncoordinated and brutally realistic, emulating *Saved*'s energy and symbolism of the vulnerable destroying the vulnerable.

To display the murder in this way, I had to instil Goblin with much more vulnerability and strange bewilderment from an earlier stage. Experimenting with writing actual social disorders such as Asperges (which I researched and have some experience with), Goblin became, like Haz, a much more hazardous and ambiguous character (moving from an original bitterness and arrogance seen in early drafts), but with a weakness which Haz targets, exploits and terrorises (I later cut the Asperges and made James ambiguously 'odd'). It was at this point that Steve Waters noted that by naming him Goblin '*aligned me with Haz*' (Waters 2011), and presented him like his monstrous

name-sake, when really, Goblin needed to be forced in to that situation, forced to breaking-point. The name Goblin (as with Bear - named people after I have met at University) originally worked as a comic nickname and point of tension between himself and Haz, but as the play evolved, and Goblin shrunk into a vulnerable and exposed young boy, it didn't suit anymore, and Goblin became James (to everyone except Haz and, occasionally, Bear). Names are important in *Phoenix* - Haz not only explains that nicknames dictate ones role and place in a gang, but real names reveal histories and relationships (Dave is Dave to Haz, but David to James, as he enters the next chapter in his life). Haz is a twisted version of himself, Harold, and is also the inspiration for Dave's child Harrison, or Harry.

'All it is is problem-solving': Phoenix's present and future

The draft of *Phoenix* presented here has had some large changes, late on. Structurally, the play moved from a two-act play (with the plane journey as the opening scene), to a two-act play, framed by an prologue and an epilogue (the plane to and from Warsaw). This was an idea that I had discussed with Steve Waters before, but which, until now, had not materialised due to me wanting to end on Haz's speech in the bedroom.

Act two was originally a three-scene act: scene one showing James's murder; scene two showing Haz confess and retell his war story in the neighbouring room; and scene three displaying the group's discovery and hysterical reaction to Star's body – ending with Haz's 'suicide'. However, in shifting, re-editing and discussing logistics and effect with Steve Waters, I tried merging the three scenes into one split-scene, which then became the entire second act (as originally intended with Bar Hydro). By having the two bedrooms next to each other on stage, I was allowed to play with juxtaposition and the effect of action and inaction. It is brutal, but more honest than its predecessors, and I feel that Haz finding the body on his own and dealing with it whilst sharing the same space as Dave, Bear and James (though also separated) builds a satisfying tension and impacting stage image. To see him preparing his 'suicide' (I always wanted to leave it fairly open and ambiguous on whether he actually manages to burn himself or not) whilst next to the hopeless Dave and Bear was far more interesting to me as a writer. In earlier drafts, they all saw Star's body and, amongst the overwhelming hysteria that occurred, Haz had to convince them that he killed her and that

they had to leave – thus giving myself huge obstacles to clear (by far, the largest in the play) without enough time to resolve them properly. But when it is Haz on his own, there is, like Edmond, only one objective and motivation. In cutting the others from his ending, I finally had the unstoppable inevitability of Mamet’s play. And then I cut away to keep the audience guessing.

With this new split-scene, I also managed to find a way of writing the plane epilogue which frames the piece. Before, I had decided against writing the journey home scene as I struggled with Bear, Dave and James’s dialogue and conversation (how could they talk about what had happened?) But with Haz’s monologue as voice-over (using the phone – something which came to me at a very late stage of writing), I could have silence between the men, whilst still utilising Haz’s poignant ending, which reinforces what is, to me, the force that drives the entire play – Haz’s undying love and complete dependence on Dave. Without Dave, and his attention, Haz has nothing left.

It is difficult for me to conclude this critical analysis. Nearly as difficult as it was to finalise *Phoenix*, but, as Moira Buffini wisely stated: ‘*finality is the goal. You have to know when to stop*’ (Buffini 2011). *Phoenix* has moved through many stages, countless drafts and revisions, and, like a moving glacier, has picked up and deposited information and detail throughout its progress. This critical analysis is a testament to only major parts of revision, redrafting and inspiration, when, really, there have been thousands. I don’t see the piece as entirely complete yet, but certainly on its way to completion - what is here pays tribute to all of the advice given, plays read, research gathered and life experience that I have accumulated thus far in my year on the course. I am proud of the play’s development, but still hope to work more thoroughly on the timing of scenes, strengthening subtexts and still refine subtlety (remembering Tony Kushner’s invaluable note to ‘*care about every word*’ (Waters 2011). I want to distil and concentrate the world of the play further and work on setting and scene description as communicating mood and tone effectively. I am confident that my dialogue is vibrant and, as David Eldridge advised ‘*openly written, with inhabitable lines, which retains specificity but allows actors to colour them in their own way*’ (Eldridge 2010). I am also happy with my plot and character development throughout.

Phoenix is not *Edmond* or *Saved*. It is not a terse and episodic stationendrama. It does not yet reach its full potential. What it is however, is an experiment with form, a build up to the inevitable, a tense, tragicomic clash of cultures, egos and energies and a play which I certainly wouldn't have been able to write on my own. *Phoenix* has been sculpted over an eventful year on an inspirational course, where I have started to sculpt my theatrical identity and my voice as a writer – and for that, it is invaluable.

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Eldridge, David. 'Under The Blue Sky and Playwriting' (09-11-2010)

(Waters 2011) refers to the teachings of Steve Waters during weekly group seminars, tutorials and personal meetings, as well as general class discussion, which took place between October 2010 and July 2011. I have taken them as verbatim from my notes and, to my knowledge, have not plagiarised Steve's words, or anyone else's, who Steve may have paraphrased.

(White 2010) refers to my original pitch for *Phoenix*, created for a class presentation which took place in our first term. This was an early exercise to sculpt our early ideas and hopes for our budding plays.

(White 2011) refers to my personal notes, made during seminars, whilst working at home and during personal meetings with Steve Waters and Stephanie Dale, as well as noted advice from all of our visiting lecturers.